

Damers First School

Liscombe Street, Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 3DF

Inspection dates

3–4 October 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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads an effective team with a relentless drive so that pupils are successful academically, emotionally and socially.
- Leaders and teachers know the pupils exceptionally well. This enables them to cater well for pupils' individual needs, including those in the resource base.
- Leaders, including governors, strongly promote the school's inclusive values and principles. As a result, pupils show genuine care, tolerance and respect towards one another.
- Senior leaders effectively check the impact of their own work. Consequently, their evaluations are accurate and they take the right actions to improve the school.
- Leaders are scrupulous in holding others to account. As a result, they are effective in improving the quality of teaching across the school.
- The school's curriculum is good. It provides a range of high-quality activities to enable pupils to apply their skills and knowledge in a variety of contexts and for a range of reasons.
- Governors are increasingly confident in their own skills to challenge leaders. However, their ways of working are not linked to priorities in the school's learning development plan (LDP). This slows improvement in some areas.
- Teachers know pupils well. They use accurate assessment information effectively to build on pupils' prior skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils typically make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through the school. This includes those with low starting points or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including in the resource base.
- Parents have much confidence in the school's leadership team. They particularly appreciate the approachability of staff and the support their children receive in reading.
- The early years is effectively led and managed. As a result, teaching and learning are strong and children make good progress. Children are well taught so that they are ready for Year 1, especially in their personal, social and emotional development.
- The teaching of phonics and spelling is not consistently strong. As a result, some pupils are not gaining the skills, competence and confidence to spell. This holds some pupils back in their writing.
- Mathematics teaching does not consistently challenge the most able pupils sufficiently to deepen their thinking and reasoning. This slows their progress and impedes their ability to use and apply their knowledge to reach the standards and levels of understanding they are capable of.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the consistency and quality of teaching to ensure that:
 - the most able pupils are challenged to deepen their thinking and reasoning skills in mathematics
 - pupils use and apply their spelling and phonics knowledge accurately in their writing.
- Further improve the effectiveness of the governing body by ensuring that monitoring is even more precisely matched to priorities in the school's learning development plan.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher drives the school with determination and ambition for the pupils. She is well supported by an effective team of leaders. Together they promote a strong inclusive ethos enabling pupils to succeed.
- School leaders know the pupils in this large school well. Their meticulous tracking systems mean that pupils are targeted for timely intervention and support, including those in the resource base. As a result, pupils benefit from effective provision to support their learning and development.
- School leaders are scrupulous in checking the impact of their actions. For example, they check the quality of teaching and have meetings with teachers to provide precise 'next steps' and guidance. Consequently, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved well, especially in the past 12 to 18 months with particularly well-matched professional training and support for individual teachers.
- School leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness are accurate. This is because they seek a wide range of information and evidence to inform their judgements. As a result, leaders know the school's needs and take the right actions to improve the school.
- Subject leaders know their subjects well and are taking effective action to improve outcomes in their subjects, including in the foundation subjects such as art. However, subject leaders' impact in a few areas, most notably spelling, is not improving quickly across the school.
- Leaders use performance management processes effectively to improve teaching. Teachers have clear targets which are linked to pupils' outcomes and priority areas in the school's LDP. As a consequence, teachers are supported and challenged to make ongoing improvements in their practice.
- School leaders ensure that high-quality professional development and training are delivered to improve staff understanding, skills and competencies. New leaders benefit from robust induction arrangements. This culminates in strong capacity with highly trained personnel in the multiple layers of the school's staffing structure.
- The curriculum is well-considered and diverse. It provides pupils with a wealth of experiences and opportunities. For example, art marks and success in various sporting and 'eco' awards capture the pupils' attention and interest. Pupils are excited and want to come to school because the curriculum meets their needs and they find learning challenging and meaningful.
- Leaders provide a wide range of additional and extra-curricular activities which complement the core curriculum. For example, with the help of the local fire brigade they have built a greenhouse out of recycled plastic bottles. As a result of this kind of activity, pupils take interest in the world around them and are learning how to be responsible citizens.
- School leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively woven through the curriculum and lessons, such as in religious education.

For example, pupils enjoyed learning about other cultures by growing their own produce on the school site and making famous dishes from around the world.

- Leaders ensure that pupils have a practical understanding of British values through wide discussion and opportunities to take on key roles in the school. For example, some older pupils are proud to be junior governors who serve others through the school's democratic and electoral school system.
- Parents are proud of the school and have confidence in the leadership. In particular, they find school staff approachable and willing to help, including in the resource base. Parents also acknowledge the work that leaders do to promote a positive culture and love of reading, even from the youngest ages.
- School leaders carefully select and utilise external support effectively to meet their own priorities in the LDP. Visits from the local authority adviser have been helpful. However, the school's effective use of the 'Dorchester area school's partnership' has been instrumental in providing key moderation and training opportunities to improve teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum.

Governance of the school

- Governors are gaining in confidence and skill, especially since the arrival of the current headteacher. This has taken a few years to establish. However, governors now have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities to provide meaningful challenge and support to school leaders.
- Governors are robust in checking the work of the school and holding leaders to account, for example through the headteacher's appraisal. Their regular visits to the school bring a wealth of first-hand information that empowers them and informs their decision-making.
- Governors know the school well and understand the complexity and unique challenges of the school. This includes catering for the needs of pupils in the resource base and others who arrive in school with challenging backgrounds and behaviour. However, they do not allow this to be an excuse. Neither have they allowed the recent building work and relocation in April 2017 to distract them from focusing on what the pupils need.
- The work and half-termly meetings of the school improvement group (SIG) enable the governing body to probe deeper into issues and priorities. This is paying dividends. However, a programme of monitoring and visits is not linked strategically enough to the LDP. As a result, findings from visits are not always followed up quickly and this results in a loss of urgency and rigour in securing some improvement.
- Governors are keenly aware of the impact of all additional grants, including the pupil premium, special educational needs and sport premium. Members of the SIG check regularly for tangible evidence of impact through monitoring. In this way, they have worked with leaders to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as improving the attendance of vulnerable pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors are fastidious in their checks, vetting systems and arrangements for child protection training. As a result, there is a good level of understanding and awareness to keep children safe.
- Staff know what to do and how to respond in different situations to ensure the safety of pupils. They know who to report concerns to and how to follow these up appropriately and quickly. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Leaders act with speed, urgency and tenacity to protect pupils and raise concerns to the appropriate authorities. They work effectively with the range of external agencies and parents in keeping pupils safe. Inspection evidence shows how extensively leaders will challenge other professionals and make repeated referrals in the best interests of pupils.
- Leaders keep well-maintained records and files. For example, risk assessments and fire evacuation logs are in place and demonstrate effective management to minimise and mitigate harm to pupils and staff.
- Pupils are happy and say that they feel safe. They know what bullying is and say this is rare in the school. However, if it happens they trust in the rapid and effective response of staff to intervene and help resolve this.
- Pupils know how to keep safe in a variety of situations. For example, they can explain what to do in the event of a fire and how to stay safe online. Year 4 'digital leaders' were actively involved in setting up the new laptops which pupils use across the school. These carry messages about keeping passwords secure. Pupils show a strong awareness of keeping themselves and each other safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers know the pupils well and have a good understanding of their different needs. As a result, teachers ensure that work is generally well matched to pupils' abilities and what they need to learn next to make good progress.
- Teaching in the resource base and for other pupils in mainstream who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. This is because teachers' plans and provision are well targeted and precisely matched to support pupils' social, emotional and academic needs.
- Teaching in the resource base is effective. Teachers use a range of good strategies to support and help the pupils. For example, visual timetables and well-established routines support pupils with complex additional needs. Consequently, pupils learn how to self-manage and be more independent.
- Teachers and other staff promote positive relationships with pupils across the school. As a result, pupils feel confident to contribute in lessons.
- Teaching assistants play a vital and effective role with pupils. They support pupils well in lessons and also through a range of high-quality interventions. This includes pupils with English as an additional language and those who need extra help with reading. As

a result, pupils make strong progress, including some from very low starting points.

- Teachers' use of assessment and tracking information ensures that pupils who need to gain ground are mostly able to catch up. Information is reviewed regularly and discussed with leaders who ensure that pupils' individual plans, including for disadvantaged pupils, are precise, measurable and focused on removing specific barriers.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to ask probing questions to deepen pupils' understanding, particularly in developing pupils' fluency in reading. It also means teachers are adept at knowing when to move pupils on.
- Teaching in mathematics draws well on practical experiences to secure pupils' understanding. However, the most able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to deepen their thinking and reasoning skills.
- The quality of daily phonics sessions is mostly effective and pupils enjoy these lessons. However, teachers do not always provide the right support and challenge to improve pupils' spelling. As a result, some pupils repeat mistakes which are not identified by teachers and this lowers the overall quality of their writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders promote a strong inclusive culture through their values, aims and ethos. Pupils are keenly aware of how to look after each other and their environment. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and show mutual respect and care to those around them.
- Staff work effectively with pupils who have complex special educational needs and/or disabilities including when these incorporate language and behavioural difficulties. Staff skills and awareness support pupils emotionally, socially and academically so that pupils can enjoy and achieve in school.
- Staff are skilled and work effectively with pupils in the resource base. Their supportive approach is welcomed by pupils and parents who quickly establish firm trust and positive relationships. Consequently, pupils settle quickly and feel emotionally secure and cared for.
- Although most behaviour in lessons is good, there are occasional episodes when pupils do not pay attention or lose interest. This happens in the minority of lessons or classes when the teaching fails to captivate pupils' interest.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and are proud of the new school building. The older pupils enjoy the positions of trust and responsibility they are given, which includes being play-monitors. These provide pupils with valuable roles and

responsibilities and contribute meaningfully to the work and life of the school, for example when junior governors attend full governors' meetings and act as a link between pupils and the governing body.

- School leaders' tenacity and their work to support vulnerable pupils is strongly improving attendance. Rigorous monitoring and involvement of others, including the school's family liaison worker, are ensuring that disadvantaged pupils attend school regularly. This is having a direct impact on raising achievement and pupils' readiness for the next stage in their learning.
- Leaders have taken firm and positive steps to improve pupils' attendance. This has risen in consecutive years and is now similar to the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have persistently high absence has reduced markedly over time and now only affects a very small minority of pupils. Overall, pupils enjoy coming to school and want to learn.
- Pupils' behaviour and overall conduct is typically good. However, there a few occasions when pupils do not take enough pride in their written work or presentation. At these times, the teaching is not quick or persistent enough in demanding more and seeking improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress in the full range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics, during their time in the school.
- In the Reception Year, the majority of children enter below 'typical' expectations, especially in physical development and social and emotional aspects of learning. However, because of good support over time, pupils leave the school in Year 4 with the majority of them having caught up.
- School leaders' conviction to ensure that pupils learn at depth and build skills based on secure personal, social and emotional development means pupils make strong progress. This includes vulnerable pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, whether in the mainstream or base provision, make good progress. Effective social and emotional targets, coupled with appropriate academic challenges, help pupils to learn well.
- Teachers now have a robust understanding of the national standards at the end of key stage 1 to ensure that more pupils can work at these standards. In 2017, results in national tests improved on the previous year in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Most-able pupils make good progress, which is reflected in the 2017 key stage 1 test results. The proportion of pupils attaining 'greater depth' in reading, writing and mathematics is continuing to rise and compares favourably to 2016 national figures.
- School leaders promote a strong culture and a love of reading. Pupils talk confidently and knowledgeably about authors and the books they like to read. Pupils' reading skills and fluency increase as pupils move through the school. At the end of Year 4, most are proficient readers and are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

- Disadvantaged pupils and other vulnerable pupils, including those in care of the local authority or who have been permanently excluded from other schools, make good progress. Leaders recognise that there is still an attainment difference but they are taking effective action to counter this.
- Pupils make good progress across the curriculum and make strong links to apply their learning in context. For example, inspectors observed Year 2 pupils using computing skills to view their route for a geography field trip. Most pupils were working independently to achieve this.
- The results for the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017 at 77% are likely to be below the national average (based on 2016 figures). This masks the fact that a third of the pupils in this cohort have special educational needs and/or disabilities and made good progress in their phonics knowledge.
- Although pupils are gaining technical knowledge of letters and sounds, their application of these to spell and build words is underdeveloped across the school. This reduces the quality of writing, including in key stage 2, where some pupils are still making errors with basic spellings including common suffixes and other age-appropriate content.
- The most able pupils are not always challenged to deepen their mathematical thinking and reasoning skills. This restricts pupils from developing fluency and mastery within key mathematical concepts, such as being able to solve a range of problems using a variety of methods, or having the knowledge to solve these efficiently.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years is well led and managed. Leaders and teachers know the children well and make good use of early information to get them learning at pace across the early years curriculum.
- Staff ensure that the right developmental steps are put in place for the children at the right times. As many children enter below 'typical' this is particularly pertinent. For example, areas and activities are set up so that children can develop independence and early personal, social, emotional and communication skills.
- The early years curriculum is broad and carefully considered to meet the full range of children's needs. For example, during the inspection a group of boys were playing in the construction area building a boat. They were interacting and communicating well and developing their motor skills. This, along with activities such as 'dough gym' is supporting boys to develop key physical skills and development at this time.
- In 2017, although the school's average for the proportion of children attaining a 'good level of development' is likely to be below the national average (including for disadvantaged children), the progress they made within the year was good. Many children, including disadvantaged boys, have been well supported in taking significant steps to catch up with their peers.
- When they leave the Reception Year, children are well placed to build on their skills and knowledge in Year 1. Inspectors tracked through children who had not attained a 'good level of development' in the previous year and found that they are already working with more complex information in their number work. They were also writing

full sentences based on a story in literacy.

- Teaching is well focused and impacts positively on the children's personal, social and emotional development. This includes the new children in the Reception Year who are in the resource base.
- Teaching does not consistently ensure that the most able children can exceed the early learning goals in reading, writing and mathematical development. As a group, they make less progress relative to others in the early years.
- Safeguarding in the early years is effective. Along with the rest of the school, there is a strong culture of awareness and determination to keep children safe and happy.
- Parents are happy and endorse the work and communication of the early years staff. A complete induction and introductory phase supports children to settle well, including those in the resource base. Parents recognise the strong work of staff and are appreciative of the warmth and welcome provided. They also talk positively about getting the children 'off to a good start'.

School details

Unique reference number	113665
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10033157

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

Type of school	First
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Moss
Headteacher	Catherine Smith
Telephone number	01305 264924
Website	www.damers.dorset.sch.uk/
Email address	office@damers.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 January 2009

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- As a First school, it is not compared to the government's floor standards.
- The school is part of the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership (DASP) trust which consists of 18 schools who provide mutual support.
- Damers First School is much larger than the average primary school. In each year group there are three classes.
- Damers First School has a specialist resource base for pupils who have complex communication needs. This can cater for up to 10 pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is significantly above the national average, particularly in some year groups.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant is below the national average.
- The school moved into its new location in April 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classes. The lead inspector was accompanied by the headteacher through the majority of inspection activities.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders to evaluate their work. These included with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher (and special educational needs coordinator), the chair of governors and representatives of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with an adviser representing Dorset local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a number of documents including governors' visits, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation, teaching and learning monitoring reports, anonymised performance management records and the learning development plan.
- An inspector also carried out one observation of part of a physical education lesson.
- Inspectors undertook extensive scrutiny of pupils' books on both days of the inspection. This was to evaluate the quality of work and check the accuracy of assessment information, including for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as those with English as an additional language.
- The lead inspector also undertook particular 'sampling' to evaluate the accuracy of teachers' assessments, particularly children's starting points when they enter the Reception Year.
- Inspectors spoke with children through various activities during the inspection and listened to pupils read. Inspectors also looked around the school in action to examine the breadth and role of the curriculum and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The inspectors observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors met with parents across both days of the inspection and took full account of the views of parents from face-to-face discussions and meetings. They also used evidence from the school's own survey from July 2017. There were no responses on Parent View before or during the inspection.

Inspection team

Stewart Gale, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jenny Boyd	Ofsted Inspector
Non Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Wilson-Chalon	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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