

The Dolphin School

25a Bath Buildings, Montpelier, Bristol, Avon BS6 5PT

Inspection dates

22–23 February 2018

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| 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 | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher provides strong leadership to the school. She is ably supported by an equally strong team of senior leaders. Together, they are securing significant improvements to the quality of education provided by the school.
- Pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching, including in the early years. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and effective planning ensure that pupils make progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The school's new enquiry-based curriculum is an emerging strength. It stimulates pupils' interest in their locality and the wider world. As a result, pupils become keen learners and make good progress.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is improving and the difference between their attainment and that of other pupils with similar starting points is diminishing. Nonetheless, in most year groups there is still work to do to close this gap further.
- Teachers use very accurate assessment of pupils' work to inform effective planning of the next steps in learning.
- Teachers are increasingly presenting the most able pupils with appropriately challenging work, although this is not consistently the case across classes and subjects.
- The school is excellent at promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's diverse community is valued highly and pupils learn to acknowledge, respect and celebrate each other's cultures and faiths.
- Pupils are happy and enthusiastic learners. They are proud of their school and are eager to talk about what they have been learning. They feel safe and are safe.
- The provision for children in the early years foundation stage is well led, planned and organised. As a result, children are making good progress from their starting points.
- The school supports pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities well. The help they receive is thoroughly monitored to ensure that additional funding is used effectively.
- School leaders work effectively to improve the attendance of pupils with very high levels of absence. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent, however, remains too high.
- Compared to the senior leadership of the school, middle leaders' roles are relatively underdeveloped. Senior leaders are aware of this and improving this aspect of the school's work is a priority in the school's development plans.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that middle leadership develops further so that it can play a fuller part in implementing the school's new curriculum.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - the most able pupils are consistently challenged by work that is pitched at the appropriate level for them
 - the difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils with similar starting points diminishes further.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by working effectively with the families of pupils who have high rates of absence so that their attendance improves.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, who took up her post in January 2017, is providing strong leadership to the school. She has helped it to stabilise after a period of some flux. In addition, she has ensured that the delayed move into new premises has been smoothly and efficiently carried out. The headteacher has a very clear, honest and robust approach to self-evaluation. She has, therefore, a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and the areas it still needs to work on. Overall, therefore, the headteacher adds demonstrable capacity to the school as it continues to develop and improve.
- The senior leadership team provides very good support to the headteacher in her drive for improvement. Two new senior leaders were appointed in September 2017, one as deputy headteacher and one as assistant headteacher. They have added considerable further capacity to the school and are making particularly important contributions to the improvement of teaching and the leadership of mathematics and literacy.
- The programme of support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well led by the school's inclusion lead in her role as the special educational needs coordinator. Pupils' needs are identified accurately and appropriate support is put in place where necessary. Any interventions are closely monitored and their impact on pupils' progress robustly evaluated. As a result, the additional funding for special educational needs is effectively targeted and well spent.
- The school's curriculum is an emerging strength. In September 2017, the school launched a new enquiry-based curriculum, which had been trialled in the previous academic year. It aims to build on pupils' curiosity about their own community and locality in order to develop their interest in the wider world. Structured around a series of interconnecting enquiries, the curriculum develops pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills across a wide range of subjects. The emphasis is on being, say, an author, a mathematician or a historian, rather than doing English, mathematics or history.
- The new curriculum is very popular with pupils, parents and staff, all of whom speak enthusiastically about the impact it is having. Pupils are very keen to share their learning. For example, pupils in Year 3 talked proudly of the enquiries they have already made and how the one they are currently doing, 'Why did people in the past travel?', connects them with the history of Bristol.
- The curriculum is supported by a well-planned extra-curricular programme. Aspects of this programme, such as providing male role models for boys and targeting particular clubs at disadvantaged pupils, allow school leaders to reinforce features of the formal curriculum. Pupils who might not normally have the opportunity are enabled to experience a wide range of activities. Leaders use the physical education (PE) and sport premium well to support the extra-curricular programme as well as the formal PE curriculum during lesson time.
- The school's work to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent. The school serves a highly diverse community and pupils from a wide range of cultures and faiths mix well together. Diversity is celebrated. When asked by inspectors what is the best thing about the school, pupils often talked about

the diversity in the school and the opportunities they have to learn about and experience other cultures. Holy days of a variety of faiths are observed throughout the school year. Black History Month is also an important part of the school's calendar, with many parents coming into school to explain their culture and heritage to pupils. As a result of all this effective work, pupils develop a strong understanding of fundamental British values and are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- Almost half the current classroom teachers are newly qualified teachers (NQTs). They are enthusiastic about their new careers and vocal in praise of the support that they get from senior leaders in developing their teaching. Staff morale generally is high and teachers and other staff are proud to work at the school.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well and its impact monitored effectively by leaders and governors. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils is improving, although there is still a difference between it and that of other pupils with similar starting points.
- The middle leadership of subject areas within the school is relatively underdeveloped at the moment. This is partly due to considerable recent turnover in staff and the recruitment of a relatively large number of NQTs. School leaders are beginning to develop subject leadership but they recognise that there is more to be done in this area, especially to support the implementation and embedding of the new curriculum.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school is good. Governors are developing in their role of critical oversight and the level of scrutiny they apply to school leaders' work is improving, as the recent minutes of governors' meetings indicate. Governors are taking advantage of training provided by the multi-academy trust to improve this aspect of their work further.
- Many governors have been with the school since it opened in 2012 and have seen the school through a period of some turbulence, especially with regard to leadership, the school premises and the changes to the school's catchment area. Members of the local governing body show a good understanding of the school's strengths and the challenges it faces.
- The multi-academy trust funded an additional senior leadership position in the summer term of 2016/17. This had a significant impact on improving the capacity of the senior leadership team, which has been built on further by the headteacher since September 2017.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Teachers are vigilant in noting any concerns or risks. They use the recently introduced online reporting system well. As a result, senior leaders have a clear and accurate picture of any safeguarding concerns across the school.
- The strong work that the school is doing in relation to female genital mutilation is a good illustration of its well-developed safeguarding culture. Senior leaders have an

excellent understanding of their statutory duties with regard to female genital mutilation. Moreover, leaders work well with groups of parents, charities, social services and the police to raise awareness of this issue in the local community.

- The school's safer recruitment practices are robust and all pre-employment checks on teachers and other staff are recorded efficiently on the single central register.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, across year groups and subjects, is good. As a result, pupils are making good progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills, including in English and mathematics.
- Teachers use secure subject knowledge to plan effectively to help pupils learn well and make progress. Teachers use the structure of the new curriculum to plan sequences of lessons that interconnect well, developing what pupils know, understand and can do across a range of subject areas.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use the new curriculum well to stimulate pupils' interest in their learning. As a result, pupils are becoming increasingly keen learners with a thirst for knowledge.
- Teachers are adept at using any misconceptions that pupils might have as a springboard to develop further learning. In mathematics, for example, pupils are encouraged to reflect on common errors in, say, adding fractions, in order to develop a deeper understanding of key concepts and processes.
- The teaching of phonics is strong and teachers and teaching assistants have excellent subject knowledge in this area. As a result, children in the early years and pupils in the rest of the school develop secure phonics knowledge. For example, pupils can use their phonics knowledge to help their writing well. The school's proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is rising over time and teachers are well equipped to provide support for these pupils as they develop their reading.
- Teachers use assessment very well. They have a secure understanding of what their pupils know, understand and can do and what their next steps need to be. They use this information to plan lessons that promote successful progress. Senior leaders use effective systems to monitor and evaluate pupils' attainment and progress. As a result, they have an accurate understanding of achievement across the school.
- Teachers typically pitch the work they set at the right level to enable pupils to move forward. In the case of the most able, however, the work they are sometimes set involves going through material that they can do comfortably before they move on to more challenging activities. On the other hand, teachers' questioning is often used well to stretch the most able pupils and to assess, probe and develop their understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Pupils at the Dolphin School develop positive attitudes to their learning. They are proud of their school and talk enthusiastically of the opportunities it provides to learn about other cultures and to celebrate them. They are very clear that 'everyone is different' and of equal value. These positive attitudes are seen across the curriculum. When engagement is less evident, teachers are effective in re-engaging pupils with their learning.
- Pupils have good levels of self-motivation and resilience. For example, they resort readily to dictionaries and thesauri if they are faced with a new or unfamiliar word, rather than turning immediately to the nearest adult.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves physically and emotionally healthy. They are also very clear that any form of bullying is unacceptable. Pupils say bullying is very rare and that school staff are good at dealing with it should it occur.
- Pupils, including children in the early years, are respectful to each other and listen carefully to others' opinions. They take turns and share well.
- The school's excellent promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development means pupils are being well prepared to be active and responsible citizens.
- The school monitors the progress, attendance and personal development of any pupils who attend alternative provision well, including by daily telephone calls and fortnightly meetings.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. As a result, the school is an orderly environment and disruptive behaviour relatively rare. Pupils are polite to each other and to adults. Most pupils are developing good self-discipline, which allows them to focus on their learning.
- School leaders and other staff have worked very well to improve the behaviour of pupils over the last year or so. Recorded behavioural incidents are down significantly, as are fixed-term exclusions and the occasions when staff have felt it necessary to intervene physically to secure pupils' safety.
- Attendance is in line with the national average but the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is still too high. School leaders and governors are acutely aware that this situation needs to improve and their work is beginning to bear fruit. Most of those pupils whose absence is too high are attending school more regularly, although they still have some way to go to reach average levels. The work of the school's family support worker has had an important impact in this improving picture.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- As a result of the good teaching they receive, pupils are making good progress across year groups and a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. They are developing secure knowledge, good understanding and competence in a range of skills, including handwriting.

- In the national curriculum assessments at the end of key stage 1 in 2017, pupils' performance dipped slightly but the attainment of pupils currently in Years 1 and 2 indicates that they are making good progress from their starting points.
- The school, being relatively new, has yet to have seen pupils through a complete key stage 2. Those pupils currently in Years 3, 4 and 5 are making good progress. In English, for example, they are developing the ability to write increasingly sophisticated pieces in a variety of genres. In mathematics, teaching is developing mastery well, especially in the areas of reasoning and problem-solving.
- Pupils across Years 1 to 5 are producing good-quality work in the new enquiry-based curriculum. This shows that they can transfer their knowledge, understanding and skills between subject areas to good effect. For example, pupils use their developing literacy skills to write well about the aspects of their enquiries that cover, say, science, history and geography.
- Effective phonics teaching is ensuring that pupils are developing their reading skills well, including those who speak English as an additional language, many of whom arrive at the school with little or no English. Relative to their starting points, pupils become more fluent readers and enjoy their reading.
- The highly effective provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities enables them to make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving, especially in Year 5. The difference between their achievement and that of other pupils is diminishing across the various key stages. Nonetheless, as school leaders are aware, there is still work to be done to close these gaps further.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years foundation stage is very well led. The provision is well organised and good use is made of the purpose-built early years area in the new premises, both indoors and outside.
- Assessment of children is accurate, both on entry and as they make progress through the year. This accurate assessment means that planning is based on a secure understanding of what children can and cannot do. As a result, activities are well planned to move children on to the next stage of their learning.
- Records of children's learning demonstrate the good progress they make from their individual starting points. In some cases, this progress is very rapid, with some children moving quickly from being hardly able to make marks to writing simple words and sentences in six months.
- Phonics teaching in Reception is strong and quickly enables children not only to develop their reading but also to make good progress in writing.
- Children are prepared well for Year 1. Teachers and teaching assistants organise activities creatively to introduce children in age-appropriate ways to the enquiry-based curriculum they will follow in subsequent years.
- Children develop well as learners. Securely established routines encourage children to listen actively and to participate in class discussions. They follow instructions and move

efficiently between activities as directed by adults. They share and take turns with each other. They develop the ability to focus on what they are doing, rather than flitting from one activity to another.

- Throughout the Reception Year, parents are closely involved in their children's education. This happens, for example, through online access to learning diaries and half-termly workshops on how to support their child's phonics, reading and writing.
- The proportion of children who attain a good level of development has fallen slightly over the last few years. This is largely a consequence of the changing nature of the cohorts. The school's catchment area has been significantly redrawn and this has meant that the school now receives a higher proportion of children who speak English as an additional language from its 29 feeder nurseries and pre-schools.
- Many of the children who speak English as a second language have little or no English when they arrive and this limits the ability of some to attain the early learning goals in communication and language and in literacy by the end of their Reception Year. Nonetheless, highly effective teaching, for example in phonics, helps these children make good progress in reading and writing from their starting points.
- The school engages well with parents, both before their children join the school and during the year they spend in Reception. Home visits by the early years leader are part of a transition process that means teachers have a good understanding of children's stage of development when they start school. Typically this is low.
- As it is in the school as a whole, safeguarding is effective in the early years and there are no breaches of the statutory welfare requirements.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 138377 |
| Local authority | Bristol City of |
| Inspection number | 10047001 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 308 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Trevor Smallwood |
| Headteacher | Shelley Dixon |
| Telephone number | 01179 240517 |
| Website | www.dolphinschoolbristol.org |
| Email address | info@dolphinschoolbristol.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 8–9 July 2014 |

Information about this school

- Dolphin School is a relatively new school in inner-city Bristol. It opened in 2012 and has added a new year group each year since then. It currently has two classes in Reception and Years 1 to 4, and one class in Year 5.
- The school is a member of the Venturers Trust, which was formed in September 2017 by the merger of Merchants' Academy Trust and the Colston's Girls' School Trust. The appropriate authority is the board of trustees, although the school has a local governing body.
- The proportions of disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language are growing, partly as a consequence of the school's catchment area being redrawn.
- The school uses one alternative provider, The Nest, which is based at Frome Vale Academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across all year groups, including the early years. Most of these visits were undertaken with the headteacher or other senior leaders. During observations in lessons, inspectors took the opportunity to speak to pupils about their learning and to look at the work in their books.
- Inspectors had discussions with the headteacher, other senior staff, teachers and support staff throughout the two days of inspection. In addition, the lead inspector spoke to members of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the trust's CEO and the trust's head of academy improvement.
- Inspectors talked to groups of key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils.
- Inspectors looked at documents provided by the school, including via the website. These documents included the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, records of pupils' achievement, governors' minutes, safeguarding records and the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff.
- In making their judgements, inspectors took into account 82 responses to Parent View, including 82 free-text comments, and 42 responses to the staff survey and 27 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors also spoke to parents as they dropped off their children at school on both days of the inspection.

Inspection team

Stephen Lee, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wendy D'Arcy

Ofsted Inspector

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