

Mendip Studio School

Knobsbury Lane, Writhlington, Radstock, Somerset BA3 3NQ

Inspection dates

15–16 March 2018

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors share a passionate commitment to the school and to the development of its distinct identity.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. In addition to the specialisms offered in electronic engineering and biosciences, pupils greatly appreciate the opportunities they have to maintain breadth in their curriculum programmes.
- Leaders ensure that pupils undertake an impressive range of extra-curricular activities. These enable pupils to develop independent research skills in an original and dynamic way.
- Students make good progress in the sixth form. Teaching enables them to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Students appreciate the support they get from teachers and value their study programmes highly.
- Leaders have established clear expectations for pupils to raise aspirations and improve attitudes. As a result of this, personal development and welfare are good.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils behave politely to each other and to staff.
- Leaders make rigorous efforts to address issues with attendance, particularly persistent absence. As a result, attendance rates for pupils are improving
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall. As a result, pupils make good progress in mathematics, and their progress in English is improving.
- Leaders have raised expectations of what pupils are able to achieve and have set more ambitious targets. The majority of teachers are responding to this well. However, leaders have yet to ensure that this is consistent across all classes and subject areas.
- Where teaching is weaker, expectations are not high enough and pupils lack self-motivation. In these cases, work is often poorly presented or unfinished and therefore is not a useful resource for pupils to consolidate their learning.
- The majority of teachers use assessment information well to provide suitable support for pupils. Where this is not the case, some work lacks challenge or leads to some pupils not being able to complete the work set.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that high expectations are consistently applied so that variations in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are reduced.
- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers make full use of assessment information about pupils' progress to plan lessons that challenge them, particularly the most able, to achieve the best that they can
 - the improvements in English teaching are embedded and sustained so that pupils make better progress from their starting points
 - teachers consistently expect a high standard of work, including in the way it is organised and presented, particularly from low- and middle-prior-attaining boys.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that pupils consistently show positive attitudes to learning in all lessons
 - improving attendance and reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and leaders articulate a clear vision for the school and the curriculum it offers. They are enthusiastic in their ambition to use industry links to provide realistic learning experiences for pupils. Pupils' problem-solving and team-working skills improve as a result.
- This ambition for the future is driven by a committed and dynamic headteacher who has a clear direction and energy to drive forward the actions needed to secure and sustain further improvement.
- Senior leaders ably support the headteacher. They know their school well, show a convincing understanding of their roles and have the capacity to ensure that strategies lead to further improvement. As a result, good progress has been made towards achieving the school's improvement priorities.
- Leaders show a successful commitment to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make the progress they should. Leaders accurately identify barriers to pupils' learning and support is well targeted. Thus, additional funding is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Leaders ensure that those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are making good progress from their respective starting points. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the support provided to ensure that it is having a positive impact.
- Senior leaders have been effective in developing the skills and expertise of middle leaders. For example, the appointment of a dedicated leader for English for the school has created extra capacity to lead the changes needed in this area.
- Middle leaders clearly understand their roles and are accountable for their work to senior leaders. Regular meetings between senior and middle leaders focus on both the progress and teachers' expectations of pupils and form the basis for consistent and accurate evaluation of the quality of classroom practice.
- Academic and pastoral middle leaders work well together to ensure that they share wider issues and identify when pupils need additional support. For example, teachers give effective support to pupils who have medical needs to help them catch up with work missed. However, this additional support does not extend to those pupils who are regularly absent.
- Recently, pastoral leaders have drawn together a more comprehensive overview of the impact of additional support for pupils in Year 11. This has been effective, as it identifies the performance of individual pupils and shares strategies that have been successful in improving progress. Middle leaders value this as a useful tool but it is too early to see the impact of this more detailed tracking on pupils' outcomes.
- Middle leaders speak highly of the training they have received and of the external support they have had. This has enabled them to develop their strategic understanding and prioritise their work more effectively. They understand clearly their role in achieving school improvement priorities.

- As a result of better monitoring and tracking, the overall quality of teaching and learning is improving. Leaders are accurate in their evaluation of what they observe, understand where there are weaknesses, and have taken swift and decisive action to address these. This action has particularly improved the progress of current pupils in English.
- Leaders provide teachers with useful information about what pupils already know, understand and can do. Where teachers plan activities based on this accurate understanding of previous learning and ability, the work provides a suitable level of challenge. However, this approach is not consistent across the curriculum.
- Leaders have done much work to ensure that assessment processes support pupils' learning. The emphasis of assessment is on the knowledge and understanding that pupils should have by a particular age. Teachers' use of assessment is beginning to have positive impact on pupils' progress.
- The accuracy of teachers' assessment is improving due to regular moderation within the school and with other providers in the area. Therefore, there is confidence that this information is reliable and, more importantly, useful in identifying pupils who need support to make the progress they should.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. In addition to the specialisms offered at the school, pupils study a wide range of subjects.
- Extra-curricular activities support pupils' learning well. Recent visits, such as to the 'Big Bang' exhibition and the weekly 'research and development' sessions give impressive examples of where pupils are able to develop independent skills in an original and engaging way. The majority of pupils take part in these sessions, but some pupils report that sometimes they are not able to do so because of transport issues. As a consequence, these pupils do not have the same opportunities to benefit from the activities on offer.
- A newly appointed coordinator of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a passionate and committed advocate in ensuring that there are meaningful experiences for pupils to consider key issues. An extensive programme is in place for pupils to discuss topics relevant to life in modern Britain. Teachers are more confident in leading learning in these areas following training and support. Staff keep parents and carers well informed and there are regular invitations for parents and carers to attend meetings to discuss specific issues. These are generally well attended.
- Leaders have ensured that there is time within the curriculum to consider these issues, further supported by outside speakers, themed weeks and an array of fund-raising opportunities. Pupils are able to speak confidently about issues such as healthy eating, but are not so confident in their understanding of concepts such as democracy.

Governance of the school

- Governors hold leaders to account for the school's performance well and challenge and support senior leaders effectively. Changes made to the structure of the governing body and to its membership have meant that there is now suitable training, and relevant experience and expertise. Thus, there is a clear focus on what leaders need to do and how this will be achieved.

- Governors use external support and advice effectively. This has had a positive effect in ensuring that structures are fit for purpose and that leaders have identified priorities correctly. There is clear determination from the governing body to address weaknesses and ambition for the future.
- Governors regularly evaluate school improvement priorities, such as the progress of disadvantaged pupils. They ensure that leaders accurately track additional funding and target it appropriately. Governors actively seek to verify reports from senior leaders through departmental and themed visits. This means that they rigorously monitor the impact of actions taken.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and leaders fully understand their safeguarding responsibilities and ensure that this culture underpins all aspects of the school's work.
- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed. All policies and guidelines clearly support the school's good practice.
- Leaders give high priority to safeguarding training and, as a result, all staff are aware of the systems in place to address any issues that arise. For example, leaders placed a particular emphasis on issues relating to the 'Prevent' duty which was shared with both staff and pupils.
- Leaders fully support more vulnerable pupils. The school works actively with outside agencies to ensure that referrals are timely and support properly evaluated.
- Leaders have recently prioritised the development of pupils' ability to know how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils clearly understand this. In addition, leaders give high priority to working with parents, who have to attend an introductory meeting before pupils receive computer equipment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching typically meets the needs of pupils. Where it is most effective, it is characterised by strong subject knowledge and planning. Teachers have a secure understanding of what progress means and use effective questioning to probe, develop and assess pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, there was clear consistency of approach in English with all pupils studying 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' at a level appropriate to their starting points.
- Teachers know and support disadvantaged pupils well. These pupils show good organisational skills and commitment to their learning.
- Leaders provide information for teachers about pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The majority of teachers use this information well to provide suitable support for pupils. Where this is not the case, some work lacks challenge or means that some pupils are not able to complete the work set.
- Where teaching is strong, pupils show that they are able to organise their work well

and are developing their ability to write in a more extended way. This is a particular focus of the recent work to raise outcomes in English.

- Teachers' monitoring and target-setting are having a positive effect on pupils' progress. In these examples, teachers clearly understand the barriers to learning and have used effective support to enable pupils to overcome them. Teachers successfully establish pupils' level of ability when they start at school, and plan work accordingly.
- Teachers provide feedback on what pupils have done well and how the quality of work might be improved. However, this practice is still variable and does not always follow leaders' expectations. Consequently, misconceptions continue into subsequent work.
- Leaders have allocated curriculum time and produced additional resources for teachers to support pupils' literacy skills. Staff model positive reading habits and encourage pupils to read more widely. However, a minority of pupils do not value this time.
- The weekly research and development sessions develop pupils' independent learning skills and add notable value to pupils' experiences. Pupils are enthusiastic about their projects. Whether it be examining the make-up of pizza boxes or developing robotic applications, pupils show a genuine commitment to taking responsibility for the development of their ideas.
- Pupils are excited about these opportunities and were keen to show inspectors their work. For example, the 'Orchid Project' is genuinely impressive, with pupils given real life-changing experiences to showcase their work around the world.
- In some teaching, the pace is slow and the teacher's questioning does not encourage pupils to think more deeply. Pupils are not consistently given time to contemplate their contributions as the teacher moves the discussion on too quickly. The level of expectation is not uniformly high enough, resulting in work that is unfinished, poorly presented and therefore not a useful source from which to revise.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are positive about their experience of the school. Pupils who joined the school in Years 10 and 12 were keen to tell inspectors the reasons for making their choices and say that the school has 'lived up' to their expectations. The vast majority of pupils are articulate, confident and willing to talk about their experiences.
- Pupils are positive about the pastoral system and benefit of working with pupils of different ages. Leaders are keen to develop the potential of this further and there are already examples of where this is used to develop pupils' leadership skills successfully.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and secure, know whom to talk to if they have a concern and do not feel that bullying or derogatory language are particular issues at the school.
- Pupils understand risk and know how to keep themselves safe. This is particularly true for online safety where pupils have a well-developed understanding of the ways they can protect themselves from harm.

- Pupils benefit from the activities provided for them to understand and appreciate diversity. They feel that the small nature of the school means that most pupils know each other and this supports pupils from different backgrounds to work well together. There is a culture of acceptance and pupils who start the school in Year 10 and Year 12 fit in quickly.
- Careers guidance is strong. Leaders organise a range of activities to support pupils to make good choices about their future plans.
- Pupils value the information provided about their next steps at the end of key stages 4 and 5. They know whom to talk to if they have a question. Year 11 pupils spoke highly of the mock interview programme, which they said prepared them well for working with employers. Careers fortnight is another example of where the school proactively engages industry links to good effect.
- Leaders are developing appropriate support and guidance in key stage 4. They have organised a more structured application process to ensure that pupils are positively choosing to come to the school because of the specialism it offers.
- The school also uses some provision at Trowbridge College. Leaders make regular contact to ensure that the quality of provision positively supports pupils' academic development and well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Senior leaders have raised expectations of how pupils should behave, both in lessons and around the site. The majority of pupils respond well to this. However, a minority of pupils and parents say that there are still those who act inappropriately and detract from learning in the classroom. Leaders are aware of this and have plans to address these issues.
- Pupils' conduct around the school contributes to a welcoming atmosphere. Relationships with staff are largely positive and pupils respond well to prompts by teachers where expectations fall below the standard expected. The majority of staff, pupils and parents who responded to the inspection survey support this view.
- Pupils largely focus well in lessons, but at times lack the resilience to complete work without prompts from the teacher. Where this is the case, pupils waste learning time and pride in their work is poor.
- Absence and persistent absence increased sharply in 2017. Leaders know the reasons for the poor attendance of individual pupils and are making successful efforts to address these. For example, the trust has recently appointed two educational welfare officers to work with families to promote the value of education.
- Leaders and other staff have worked well to improve the attendance of those pupils who previously had very high levels of absence.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The progress of current pupils shows that performance in English is improving.

Evidence shows that pupils are increasingly able to extend their writing and access the higher level skills needed to improve outcomes.

- The work of current pupils in mathematics, science and humanities shows that pupils continue to make the good progress that the results from 2017 indicated.
- In the sixth form, the progress of current students shows greater evidence of challenge. Teachers support students to think more critically to further extend their understanding.
- Disadvantaged pupils made slower progress than their counterparts in 2017. However, current assessment information suggests that these pupils are now making stronger progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities made good progress from their starting points in 2017. Teachers provide current pupils with the targeted support they need to enable them to progress well.
- The first cohort of pupils from the school took their GCSE examinations in 2017. Progress of pupils overall was in line with national figures. Progress in mathematics was strong and was in the top 10% of schools nationally, whereas progress in English was significantly below the national figure and in the bottom 10% of schools.
- The number of pupils achieving at least a grade 4 (previously grade C) in English and mathematics GCSE was in line with national averages in 2017. Overall, the proportion of pupils achieving a higher grade in mathematics was greater than those for English.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision are making good progress.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form is good. Students are encouraged in a range of subjects to consider concepts more deeply and develop their independent and research skills.
- Teachers prepare students well for the requirements of post-16 study. Students show that they are able to understand and apply examination criteria. There are good examples within geography and drama of where teachers give students time to reflect on examination responses and how these could be improved further. This is having a positive impact on the level of students' work.
- Sixth-form students are positive about their subject choices and feel that teachers support them to improve. They take opportunities to refine and develop their understanding, using the feedback teachers give them.
- The leadership of the sixth form is effective. Leaders are able to identify students who do not make the progress they should and middle leaders ensure that strategies address this. Leaders have identified poor attendance as a particular factor affecting progress and, as a result of actions taken, this has improved.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes meet requirements. In addition to their chosen courses, students take part in activities that enable them to consider issues relating to their personal, social and moral well-being. A large number of students take part in fund-raising opportunities, raising money for charities such as Dementia UK.

- In 2017, students who studied A levels performed significantly below the national average overall. The most able did not achieve the highest grades that they should. Students that studied applied subjects achieved results broadly in line with the national figures.
- Students do not always value the tutor programme, assemblies and curriculum days, but leaders are aware of this and are actively seeking ways to address this issue.
- Leaders ensure that students without a grade 4 (previously grade C) in English and mathematics GCSE have sufficient curriculum time and qualified staff to teach them. Those students who needed to re-take English and mathematics GCSE in the sixth form in 2017 performed significantly above the national average.
- Work experience opportunities are now more robust and safeguarding checks are rigorous. The majority of students complete formal work experience. In addition to these work placements, the majority of students participate in projects that develop their skills for the world of work. For example, students studying information and communication technology are working with a local company to develop a website and Twitter feed.
- School staff prepare students well for the next stage of their education or training. Careers education in the sixth form is strong. The majority of students enter higher education and they value the preparation they receive for university applications.
- Students who leave at the end of Year 12 receive good advice and support, which helps them to make appropriate choices about their future.

School details

Unique reference number	142125
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	10042658

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	67
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Richard Akers
Headteacher	Bruce Hain
Telephone number	01761 438557
Website	www.mendipstudioschool.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@mendipstudioschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in 2015. It is a small school with a specific focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, specialising in electronic engineering and biosciences. The first year of GCSEs and A levels was in 2017.
- The school is one of three schools that are part of the Dragonfly Educational Trust. Leadership and staffing are shared with Writhlington School and there is some joint teaching.
- A small number of pupils use provision at Trowbridge College.
- The current headteacher joined in April 2016 and the school moved into purpose-built

accommodation in February 2017.

- The proportion of pupils supported by the additional pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.
- The proportion pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- There is a small percentage of pupils from a minority ethnic group.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons, across a range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised pupils' written work. Some of the observations were jointly conducted with curriculum leaders and members of the leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the leadership team, the executive headteacher, and the chair and representatives of the governing body. In addition, inspectors met with curriculum leaders and pastoral managers.
- Inspectors met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning.
- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation, including the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for future improvement, progress, behaviour and attendance information relating to current pupils, and minutes of governing body meetings.
- The school's policies relating to safeguarding, pupils' behaviour, the use of additional funding (including the pupil premium), and the curriculum were also checked.
- Inspectors considered 21 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 44 responses to the staff questionnaire and 10 responses to the questionnaire for pupils, provided by Ofsted.

Inspection team

Sarah McGinnis, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Green	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Lee	Her Majesty's 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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