

# The Charles Dickens School

Broadstairs Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 2RL

## Inspection dates

25–26 June 2019

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Year 11 pupils' attainment and progress in 2018 were well below the national average, including in English, mathematics and science. The progress of current pupils is improving, particularly in key stage 3.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Strengths in some lessons are not evident throughout. Some teachers do not plan lessons carefully enough to provide either enough challenge for the most able or appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Historically, disadvantaged pupils have performed poorly. Leaders' actions have improved this group's attendance, which supports their better progress.
- Teachers do not consistently communicate high expectations, either of good behaviour or the standard of work that they want pupils to achieve. Low-level disruption slows learning in some lessons.
- Pupils did not have the opportunity to study languages in key stage 4 last year. Take-up of languages is now improving but remains low in relation to national averages and the government's target for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).
- The quality of pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is variable, which limits some aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- Difficulties in recruitment have hampered leaders' efforts to improve teaching.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leadership at all levels has strengthened since the school joined the Barton Court Academy Trust. Leaders have been tireless in tackling the areas of weakness and are having a demonstrable impact on improving the school.
- Strong teaching can be found in a number of subjects, which is leading to pupils making better progress than they have in the past.
- Leaders have improved pupils' attendance. It is now in line with national levels.
- Most pupils behave well. They are polite and respectful to visitors, staff and each other.
- The resource centre provides excellent support for pupils with visual impairment. This enables them to be fully integrated within the whole school.
- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school so that it leads to improved outcomes for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, by:
  - ensuring that teachers' expectations for pupils' learning and written work are consistently high across the school
  - reducing variability in the planning and delivery of learning activities
  - ensuring that teachers plan activities based on a secure understanding of pupils' prior attainment and learning needs
  - ensuring that pupils use the feedback they receive to improve their work.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  - eliminating low-level disruption in lessons
  - ensuring that staff respond consistently to pupils whose behaviour does not meet expectations
  - ensuring that the planned programme of PSHE and SMSC is taught effectively in tutor time and through other curriculum experiences.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by:
  - increasing the challenge for the most able pupils, so that they achieve their best in each subject
  - ensuring that strategies to improve the learning of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are used consistently throughout the school
  - increasing significantly the proportion of pupils who successfully achieve the EBacc.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders at the school and the trust work well together and have shown determination in tackling the many challenges the school has faced in recent years. The executive headteacher has provided firm and decisive leadership since the school joined the Barton Court Academy Trust in 2017. The large-scale reorganisation of staffing and management systems has strengthened leadership at all levels and achieved financial stability. There is now a strong platform for the recently appointed headteacher to improve the school further.
- Leaders' ambitious vision for the school is shaped by their resolve to raise the aspirations of the school community. Leaders are determined for pupils at the school to receive a high-quality education that will enable them to make outstanding progress in all aspects of the curriculum. School improvement priorities are tightly focused around achieving this vision. All actions are monitored and evaluated robustly, and leaders and teachers are held to account for pupils' progress.
- Leaders have resolutely tackled weak teaching. Large numbers of staff have been supported through formal procedures to improve their practice. In some cases, this support has led to improvements, but in a number of other cases staff have left the school. The previously rapid turnover of staff has now slowed as leaders have stabilised the school. Nevertheless, some pupils have experienced several changes of teachers in a range of subjects across the curriculum, and this has limited their motivation and progress.
- Subject leaders show substantial expertise and a determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress. As a result of leaders' higher expectations, teaching is improving, although some variation in the quality of teaching persists across and within subjects.
- Leaders at all levels, including the directors of the trust, rigorously track pupils' progress and attainment. Leaders use this information well to identify gaps in pupils' learning and to provide support for teachers to address these issues. This is more successful where teaching is consistently stronger.
- Staff feel well supported to improve their teaching. Training opportunities are frequent and well targeted to meet whole-school priorities and the needs of staff. For example, more staff are routinely using teaching strategies that encourage pupils to think harder about their learning. Leaders routinely coach staff and provide bespoke support.
- Newly qualified teachers are supported effectively. A number of previously unqualified teachers have been successfully trained by the school and are adding strength to the quality of teaching in their subject areas.
- Leaders have focused on adapting the curriculum to ensure that it better meets pupils learning needs and aspirations. Pupils have a broad range of choices for key stage 4, which build effectively on their starting points and preferences. Many more pupils now have the opportunity to study languages than they have in the past, and leaders have an ambition to increase numbers further.
- Provision for pupils' SMSC development is delivered through the tutor programme of

PSHE sessions, additional enrichment activities and the subject curriculum. Leaders have identified that the quality of tutor-time activities is variable and that more opportunities need to be provided to strengthen pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness.

- Additional pupil premium funding is carefully targeted and very closely monitored. Leaders have directed this funding on a range of strategies to raise pupils' aspirations, increase progress and improve attendance. Progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving because they are now attending more regularly and there is better teaching. Disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 are making similar progress to others in the school. However, there is a long way to go before they catch up with other pupils nationally.
- Additional funding for Year 7 pupils who need to catch up with their literacy and numeracy is used effectively. Funding is targeted on providing bespoke support for pupils in the 'secondary ready' curriculum pathway. Most of these pupils are making better progress with their English and mathematics as a result of the support they receive.
- The leadership of SEND is improving. Teachers receive very helpful information and guidance about meeting the learning needs of pupils with SEND. Pupils' academic progress and personal learning targets are monitored rigorously across the curriculum. However, these pupils do not yet make strong progress because the quality of teaching they experience is variable.
- Leaders ensure that pupils who have visual impairment have excellent support from highly trained specialist staff. These pupils are fully integrated into the school and make good progress with their learning and personal development.
- Pupils are supported well through a strong programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance. Leaders ensure that all pupils are supported to move on to post-16 education and/or training.
- Parents and carers recognise the improvements in the school. Three quarters of parents who responded to the Ofsted online survey said they would recommend the school to other parents. However, some raised concerns about the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour.

## **Governance of the school**

- The board of trustees has ensured that the school received the support that it needed to address the significant challenges it faced when it joined the trust. Several leaders employed within the trust, including the executive headteacher and head of school, have been deployed full time to lead the school, prior to the appointment of a permanent headteacher. The trust has supported the executive headteacher in restructuring the school. It has ensured a clear focus on school improvement, including strong financial systems, which are ensuring that the school remains within budget.
- The board is very well informed about the performance of the school because of the very detailed monitoring reports it receives from the executive headteacher and the local governing body. They have used the support of external educational professionals to assure themselves that the information they are provided with is accurate and

reliable. Consequently, the board provides a good level of challenge to school leaders.

- The local governing body (LGB) is dedicated and committed. It works closely with school leaders and trustees to scrutinise all aspects of the school's work, including pupil premium and SEND. Governors feel that their aspirations have been raised since joining the trust because they have a better understanding of pupil assessment information. As a result, they are better equipped to challenge leaders over the progress of specific groups of pupils.
- Expertise on the local governing body is increasingly being used to strengthen the knowledge and understanding of trustees. The chair of the LGB attends trustee board meetings and local expertise in safeguarding is being shared across the trust.
- The board of trustees holds leaders to account effectively for the use of additional funding for the pupil premium and SEND. However, it does not have the same oversight for the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors work together well to ensure that the school's work to safeguard pupils is comprehensive and effective. Leaders prioritise this aspect of their work and have successfully created a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. All adults involved with the school undergo relevant training and frequent updates so that they understand signs to be alert to and actions to take if they are worried about the safety or welfare of a child.
- Staff have positive relationships with pupils and know them well. Pupils feel safe in the school. They are confident in knowing that there is always a trusted adult they can speak to if they are worried about something. They particularly appreciate the support provided by the pastoral team in the pupil support 'hub'.
- The school has well-developed systems in place to secure the well-being and safety of pupils. Safeguarding records are up to date, and referrals are followed up promptly and are well documented. Safeguarding leaders work well with other agencies to help families receive the necessary support. Leaders and governors regularly check the records and the school's work in this area.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Although teaching is improving, there remains too much variation across the school, both within and between subjects. Leaders have high expectations of staff and have provided high-quality support for them. However, this support has not yet secured effective practice across the school. Pupils' overall learning experience is, at times, further impeded by changes of teacher, leading to more variability.
- Different teachers' expectations of pupils' work vary in and between subjects. Pupils' workbooks show that many teachers demand high standards, but some accept poor-quality work that is sometimes unfinished. Often, teachers do not ensure that pupils use the feedback they receive to improve their work.

- Where pupils' learning is less successful, teachers do not consistently use assessment of pupils' progress to set work at an appropriate level or devise engaging activities. Often, activities do not encourage pupils to persevere and write in detail about their learning. Some pupils lack the confidence and practice to be able to express their understanding clearly. In lessons where pupils do not receive effective support, pupils give up too easily and become restless, making it difficult for other pupils to concentrate.
- Where learning is more successful, teachers' expectations are high and learning activities are planned carefully to secure pupils' knowledge and understanding and address their misconceptions. For example, in history Year 9 pupils were able to explain the impact of communist rule in Czechoslovakia, gradually introducing new ideas which built upon what they knew already. Pupils rose to the challenge to compare information from different sources and explain their ideas using specialist vocabulary.
- Strong teaching can be found in several areas, particularly history, music and physical education (PE). In music, pupils were completely engrossed in learning to play the ukulele. There was real joy on the faces of many of the pupils when they realised they had managed to play two chords on an instrument they had never played before.
- For the first time in several years, there is now effective language teaching, which is helping pupils to develop more positive attitudes to the subject and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to be successful linguists.
- In some cases, teachers do not follow the school's assessment policy. When this is the case, pupils do not get the feedback that they need to improve their work and are unable to learn from their mistakes. However, for the most part, pupils get precise feedback on their next steps and are given the time to act on this feedback. Pupils confirm that most of their teachers give them helpful advice on how to improve their work.
- Most staff share leaders' high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This creates a sense of purpose that pupils respond to well. However, difficulties in staff recruitment mean that some pupils have had a series of temporary teachers, especially in English, mathematics and science. Leaders, pupils and parents are frustrated by this as it hinders pupils' progress.
- Most parents said they receive helpful information about their children's progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils have little understanding of the meaning of fundamental British values. Although they are respectful of people from different backgrounds, religions and sexual orientations, the quality of other aspects of the PSHE programme is variable.
- A minority of parents and pupils raised concerns about bullying at the school. School information indicates that leaders take incidents of bullying seriously and that the

number of reported incidents is reducing. Pupil anti-bullying ambassadors have been trained but the sustained impact of their work is not yet clear

- Pupils are cooperative and work well together. They listen well to each other's ideas and enjoy sharing their thoughts about topics. They were polite and courteous to inspectors and take pride in their appearance. Pupils have gained a confident knowledge of how to protect themselves from risk when online as a result of the effective e-safety sessions.
- Pupils are supported well by pastoral staff. Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are strong. Staff know pupils well and are alert to any difficulties pupils may be experiencing. The school's pastoral support teams work effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the care and support they require.
- Equality of opportunity is actively promoted. Many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have taken part in visits to universities to raise awareness of the opportunities available to them. Girls have also taken part in visits that encourage them to consider careers in science and engineering.
- The most able pupils benefit from an increasing number of extra-curricular activities that are raising their aspirations and awareness of higher education and extending their knowledge of some subjects, such as English, history and Spanish.
- The school vigorously promotes healthy eating. Leaders have taken a firm stand on pupils bringing unhealthy foods into the school. Large numbers of pupils take advantage of the free breakfasts provided, and the school has recently achieved national recognition for its efforts to provide free breakfasts.
- The social and emotional well-being of pupils with visual impairment is carefully supported. A specific programme to raise the self-esteem and confidence of these pupils is in place, which includes access to a school counsellor. Pupils participate in events held in the school, including work experience. The attendance of these pupils is slightly below the average of others in the school.
- Most parents agree that their children are happy and safe at the school.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement
- The atmosphere around the school and in most lessons is mainly purposeful and orderly. Most pupils are polite and show respect and consideration for others. Pupils get down to work quickly and remain focused when lessons are well planned and expectations are made clear.
- However, pupils do not always display good attitudes to learning, typically in lessons where teachers' expectations for purposeful learning have not been made clear. In these lessons, some pupils' chatter leads to low-level disruption, which slows their progress and that of their classmates.
- Almost all of the pupils spoken to during the inspection told inspectors that behaviour has considerably improved in the school in the last two years. However, they said that some lessons continue to be disrupted, particularly when there are new or temporary

teachers taking the class.

- The rate of pupils' attendance at school has risen rapidly and is now in line with the national average. This success is due to leaders' determined work and the thoughtful range of strategies that they have implemented. This work has been especially successful for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose attendance has improved dramatically.
- A relatively high number of pupils currently attend alternative provision at two pupil referral settings. All of these pupils were at risk of permanent exclusion because of their behaviour. Most of these pupils are showing an improvement in their behaviour and attendance, and all of the Year 11 pupils have offers for post-16 colleges.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Over time, pupils' published outcomes have been below the national averages. In 2018, all groups of pupils made rates of progress which were well below the national average from their different starting points in almost all areas of the curriculum. Although current pupils in the school are making stronger progress, there is some way to go before pupils achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.
- Only one pupil successfully achieved the qualifications which make up the EBacc in 2018, because pupils did not have the opportunity to study a modern foreign language. Leaders have taken appropriate action to ensure that more pupils successfully achieve the EBacc in the future.
- The school's assessment information shows that current pupils in Year 11 have achieved better in their classwork and mock examinations than previous cohorts. Leaders have gone to great lengths to confirm the accuracy of this assessment information and are confident that the outcomes of this year group will be higher than last year overall, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Pupils have achieved better outcomes in vocational subjects than they have in GCSEs. Most pupils gained at least one BTEC Technical Award qualification in 2018 and achieved outcomes that were similar to the national average. Current pupils are also achieving well in these subjects because they are motivated by their learning and benefit from effective teaching.
- Current pupils are making stronger progress than previously as a result of the improved teaching in many areas of the curriculum. However, there are variations in different year groups and across different subjects.
- Current pupils in Years 7 and 8 are making more secure progress in most subject areas. This is because the curriculum better helps pupils to develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding and there is less legacy of previously weak teaching. However, the most able pupils continue to make less progress in some subjects. The most able pupils do not have enough opportunities, either in English and science to extend their writing, or in mathematics to tackle tasks that require reasoning skills.
- Leaders are keenly aware that in previous years the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been too slow. Leaders have taken account of research evidence to place a sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching that these pupils receive. Leaders' assessment information, and the work in pupils' books, demonstrates that



disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than previously. In key stage 3 disadvantaged pupils are achieving as well as other pupils in the school.

- The special educational needs coordinator has identified accurately the pupils who need support. He has provided teachers with high-quality information about each pupil's barriers to learning with advice on how to overcome these barriers. Teaching assistants are well trained in providing specific interventions. Consequently, most current pupils with SEND, including those in the resource base, are making similar rates of progress to all pupils.
- Leaders monitor very carefully the progress of the pupils who attend alternative provisions. All of these pupils are studying appropriate qualifications, including English, mathematics and science.
- Historically, because of their poor examination results, pupils have not been well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment. However, in 2018, nearly all pupils moved successfully to appropriate destinations.

## School details

Unique reference number	144015
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10106989

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1085
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	William Speed
Headteacher	Warren Smith
Telephone number	01843 862 988
Website	<a href="http://www.cds.kent.sch.uk">www.cds.kent.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@cds.kent.sch.uk">office@cds.kent.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The Charles Dickens school is a slightly larger-than-average-sized secondary school. It opened on 1 March 2017 when it joined the Barton Court Academy Trust. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2014, it was judged to be inadequate and requiring special measures. Since 2014, the school has had three different school improvement partners.
- The executive headteacher of the trust has been responsible for the day-to-day running of the school since it joined the trust. A permanent headteacher has been in post since 1 June 2019.
- The school does not currently have any students in the sixth form, following a directive from Kent County Council in 2017. Pupils from the school are given priority to enter the sixth form at Barton Court Grammar School.
- The school is non-selective in an area of selective education. There are several grammar schools in the local area. Therefore, the prior attainment of pupils at the

school is below the national average.

- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. The school has a special educational needs resource base. This is a Kent County Council resource to support pupils who have sensory impairment. There are six funded places, all of which are taken up. All of the pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school serves an area of higher-than-average deprivation.
- The proportion of pupils who attract government pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- 21 pupils attend alternative educational provision run by the Enterprise Learning Alliance to support them with their behaviour and attendance.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 42 lessons across a wide range of subjects in different year groups. Many observations were undertaken jointly with school leaders. In addition, inspectors visited an assembly, attended tutor sessions and carried out brief visits to lessons to observe behaviour.
- Inspectors met with pupils to listen to their views, both formally and informally.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, and representatives from the board of trustees and local governing body. An inspector also had a telephone conversation with the leader of two alternative provision settings.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation that included: information about pupils' attainment and progress; the school's improvement plan; minutes of meetings of the board of trustees; and records relating to teaching and learning, pupils' attendance and behaviour, and safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaks, lunchtimes, in lessons and assemblies, during registration periods, and at the beginning and end of the school day. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and looked at samples of their books jointly with leaders.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in the 103 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as comments received via Ofsted's free-text service. Inspectors also took into account the 68 responses to a questionnaire for staff and 11 responses to the pupil survey.

## Inspection team

Mark Bagust, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Frederick Valletta	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Storey	Ofsted Inspector
Gerard Strong	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

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