

Inspection of Dorchester Learning Centre

Monkton Park, Winterborne Monkton, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9PS

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 May 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade **Good**

What is it like to attend this school?

There are secure and trusting relationships between staff and pupils at Dorchester Learning Centre. These are vital to the success and positive experiences of the pupils who attend. Staff are ambitious in their vision to get the best possible outcomes for pupils during their time at the school. Staff encourage pupils to be aspirational and leaders work to make sure that pupils receive the support they need towards achieving their goals.

Pupils value the time that staff dedicate to getting to know them so that they can respond appropriately to their needs. As a result, pupils feel safe and want to attend. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the impact the school has on their child.

Staff are calm and empathetic when supporting pupils who are struggling. Pupils say that staff manage this well. They trust adults and will share concerns and worries if they want help.

Pupils talk passionately about having a voice in school. The student council is fully involved in school improvement. Pupils' wider development is well considered so that they are prepared for life after school. Their welfare, physical and mental health is made a priority. Pupils learn how to manage this positively.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum for pupils from primary through to Year 11. As a result of the referral process and the type of placement they are on, pupils start and end their time at different points. Staff take into account the variable start and end points and the previous, often very negative, experiences pupils have had of education when delivering learning. However, some middle leaders do not yet have an in-depth, strategic overview of their areas of responsibility. As a result, they do not develop teachers' expertise, knowledge and understanding or drive forward improvement in their areas as successfully as they could.

Pupils at the Kingfisher Learning Centre also have variable amounts of time working with the education staff. Staff ensure they know pupils well. As a result, pupils in hospital are taught in a safe and well-resourced environment. Their medical and learning needs are supported well.

Leaders prioritise reading. They know how important it is to the future success of pupils. Leaders support staff to tailor the approach to reading to meet the needs of individual pupils. This is replicated in mathematics. There is a consistent approach which is adapted to individual pupils. However, the early and ongoing education of many of the pupils has been disrupted. Some staff do not have a deep enough understanding of the teaching of early reading and early mathematics. As a result,

they sometimes do not identify gaps in pupils' learning and address them swiftly enough.

Pupils know that staff have high expectations of them. They have respect for these and the staff that model them. However, they accept that there are times when their behaviour is challenging. Staff respond to struggling pupils with sensitivity and understanding. On the whole, the school is a calm environment. When pupils are dysregulated, staff support each other to reach resolutions that are appropriate for the pupils involved. Leaders consider the welfare of all involved and planning for next steps is timely. Consequently, relationships and trust are not damaged.

The personal development of pupils is a strength of the school. It brings together the shared vision of 'one pupil, one plan'. As such, pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education. The school is inclusive. Pupils are tolerant and accepting of the diversity in their peer groups. Staff provide pupils with opportunities beyond the academic curriculum. They have access to activities of personal interests that develop their confidence, resilience and future aspirations. Staff provide pupils with relevant and unbiased careers guidance. Pupils have the opportunity to look into a range of employment options. Leaders think creatively about the work experience opportunities on offer. The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Keeping pupils safe is high priority for all staff. Leaders use daily communication to ensure that staff are well informed so that they are proactive in their support of pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders ensure staff are up to date with training and pertinent issues. Staff are quick to report any concerns. Leaders work tenaciously to ensure that appropriate and timely support is in place so that pupils get the help they need. The school keeps detailed records on the suitability of staff to work in the school.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum and their wider development.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all staff across the school have an understanding of early reading and early mathematics. As a result, there are gaps in pupil's knowledge that are not identified and addressed as effectively as they could be. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have a secure understanding of early reading and mathematics so it can be applied in all subjects, across all ages.
- Some middle leaders do not have an in-depth, whole school overview of their areas of responsibility. As a result, they are not able to fully support staff in

increasing their expertise, knowledge and understanding or drive forward improvement in their areas as effectively as they could. Leaders need to ensure that middle leaders have a well-informed whole school overview of their areas of responsibility.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 130316 |
| Local authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 10210900 |
| Type of school | Pupil referral unit |
| School category | Maintained Pupil referral unit |
| Age range of pupils | 5 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 74 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Ian Roe |
| Headteacher | David Dinsmore |
| Website | www.dlconline.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 26 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school has a new leadership team in place since the last inspection.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased recently. The school now has Primary-aged pupils.
- Pupil admissions come through different referral routes. There are a mix of pupils on single and dual registration placements.
- The school does not use any alternative provision currently.
- The school manages Kingfisher Learning Centre at Dorchester Hospital. School staff deliver learning to children on the Kingfisher Ward five days a week.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of the governing board, including the chair. In addition, an inspector met with the school's education challenge leader.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector also looked at additional subjects including science.
- An inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors considered how well the school protects pupils and keeps them safe.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement. Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum and behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the 13 responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 13 free-text responses along with the one response to the pupil online survey and 33 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Heather Barraclough

Her Majesty's Inspector

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