

Inspection of The Dolphin School

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

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

The headteacher of this school is Kate Wells. This school is part of the Venturers Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer, David Moran, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gail Bragg. An interim headteacher, Kirsteen Craig, is currently responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Dolphin School is an inclusive place in which to learn. It puts children at the heart of the community. Pupils describe the school as friendly and welcoming. They like how staff take the time to get to know them as individuals. This makes them feel safe to talk about their feelings or worries.

Since the previous inspection, the school has not done enough to maintain a good quality of education. Interim leaders know this. They are working on the right things to bring about improvements to the curriculum. However, many positive changes are recent and need time to embed.

Pupils behave well. They know the importance of working hard and being kind. Staff swiftly sort out minor disruptions to ensure that learning time is not lost. Behaviour at lunchtime is improving now pupils have more to do. They have great fun dressing up in clothes and playing with puppets.

Every effort is made to celebrate the wide range of languages, faiths and cultures represented in the school. Pupils regularly engage in cultural events, such as singing at the Windrush concert and taking part in the St. Paul's carnival. These and other experiences help pupils develop a strong sense of community.

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

The trust and interim leaders know what needs to improve. They have taken decisive action to evaluate and strengthen the curriculum. For example, they found that previously, the curriculum overloaded pupils with too much information. This meant that pupils could not remember their learning well.

The new curriculum is planned carefully. Where subjects are more established, pupils can recall prior learning. For example, pupils use the French they know to count and write simple sentences. In geography, pupils read maps confidently to locate countries. However, across different subjects, some staff do not implement the curriculum the way the school intends. This slows the progress some pupils make, including children in the early years.

The school prioritises children's early language and reading development right from the start. In Reception Year, staff use stories and songs to develop children's speaking and listening skills. Nonetheless, some adults do not encourage children to practise their speaking during work and play. An effective phonics programme is in place. Staff use assessment well to spot pupils who fall behind. Pupils enjoy reading and understand how it can improve their writing. However, pupils who struggle to read, including some in key stage 2, do not get enough practise reading books. This makes it harder for them to build their confidence and fluency.

The school has created a strong culture of inclusion. It quickly identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Carefully considered pastoral

support helps pupils with challenging social and emotional needs settle successfully into school life. Staff know pupils' precise needs. However, some teachers do not adapt learning for different groups of pupils well enough. This makes it harder for pupils to learn new information.

In the Reception class, children follow the behaviours and routines they need to help them learn, such as listening and using 'kind hands'. Staff reinforce high expectations for pupils' behaviour throughout the school. Pupils know the importance of attending school regularly. They enjoy the weekly 'HERO' awards. This celebrates high attendance and punctuality. When poor attendance is an issue, the school challenges and supports parents to remove any barriers. As a result, the number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing.

Personal development is a strength. The school broadens pupils' understanding of the world around them. For example, pupils watch theatre productions and visit places of cultural interest. The school works closely with local police to promote the importance of staying safe in the community. Pupils have an active voice. They are given opportunities to suggest improvements to the curriculum, such as how the law protects people with different characteristics. The school's effective work supports pupils to be caring young citizens.

Most parents and carers hold positive views about the school. They like how their children learn about the diverse community they belong to. Staff enjoy working at the school. They value the opportunity to share expertise and best practices across the trust. The school is well placed to bring about further improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils who struggle to read do not get enough practise reading books. This makes it difficult for them to build their confidence and fluency. The trust should ensure that these pupils get the right support to become fluent readers.
- In a few subjects, some staff do not implement the curriculum as the school intends. This slows the progress pupils make. The trust should ensure that the planned improvements to the curriculum are implemented effectively in all subjects and phases.
- Some staff do not adapt learning well enough for different groups of pupils. This makes it harder for pupils to learn new concepts. The trust needs to ensure that staff understand how to tailor learning, so that all groups of pupils build knowledge securely across all subjects.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138377
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10298006
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	210
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gail Bragg
Headteacher	Kate Wells
Website	www.dolphinschoolbristol.org
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 February 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Venturers Trust, a multi-academy trust in Bristol.
- Changes in leadership and teaching staff have occurred since the previous inspection. The headteacher took up post in September 2022. She was absent during this inspection. An interim headteacher is currently leading the school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held discussions with the interim headteacher, interim assistant headteacher, the deputy chief executive officer, the director of education, the chair of the multi-academy trust and three members of the local governing board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, geography, and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the school, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked more widely at pupils' writing.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 read to an adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector met the designated safeguarding lead, checked the single central record of adults working in the school, took account of the views of staff and pupils, and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, during breaktime and lunchtime. They spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff to discuss how the school supports their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the end of the school day. They considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kathy Maddocks

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023