



# The Dormston School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 103855  
**Local Authority** Dudley  
**Inspection number** 286789  
**Inspection date** 16 October 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Frank Knowles

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Mill Bank
<b>School category</b>	Community		Sedgley
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Dudley DY3 1SN
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01384 816395
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1129	<b>Fax number</b>	01384 816396
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Pauline Gregory
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephanie Sherwood
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 December 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–16	16 October 2006	286789

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Dormston School is larger than average and serves the community of Sedgley in the northern part of Dudley. Its pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and most are of White British heritage. Fewer pupils than average are eligible for free school meals, although some other indicators suggest greater levels of disadvantage in the area from which the school draws pupils. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average.

As from September 2006, the school has had specialist status as a mathematics and computing college.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Dormston is a good school that serves the community of Sedgley well. The headteacher and senior leaders bring a consistent drive to improve the performance of the school and to maximise pupils' achievement. They have also set a culture of good relationships and respect for others in which pupils learn effectively and achieve well. One parent's comment sums up the views of many others: 'We have always been very pleased with the progress our children have made, and with the standards and ethos adopted by the school.' Its recent success in achieving specialist school status complements well its established reputation in the area for the performing arts.

Pupils come to school wanting to learn. Younger pupils are excited by the range of facilities the school offers and one commented, 'I really like the lessons here.' The way the school sets realistic and achievable targets for pupils is a strength and helps them focus on clear learning goals. Teachers' marking is good at showing them how they can improve their work further. Tutors carefully check how well pupils are working towards achieving their targets and, where necessary, take action to make sure the right levels of support are there for them. This regular checking means that pupils know what they are aiming for and how well they are doing. They enjoy school, feel safe there, and their personal development and well-being are good. The care, guidance and support pupils receive are also good, and pupils are confident they can turn to their tutors to discuss something that is worrying them.

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. A good curriculum and well planned lessons take account of different ways of learning and match the abilities of pupils well. The strong focus on the requirements of examinations in the teaching in Years 10 and 11 means pupils are well prepared for them.

Standards at Dormston are improving. The school has an intake with fewer high attainers than is typical, but pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and achieve above average standards in national tests, with much improved numbers reaching the higher levels in 2006. GCSE results have also improved overall, and pupils continue to make good progress, although there is some variation from year to year in subject results. Standards at the end of Year 11 are broadly average. The school is consistent in securing the good achievement of average and above average attaining pupils, and in supporting those with learning difficulties to make good progress.

The culture of coming to school to learn which has been established with most pupils does not extend fully to all, however. Some pupils, particularly boys who joined the school with lower attainment, do not make such good progress as others. Their less positive attitudes towards their work mean teachers and other staff sometimes have to work hard in lessons to keep up the pace of learning. The school has recognised this issue and has begun to tackle it through additional responsibilities for a member of staff and involvement with other schools that have had success in improving the motivation of boys to learn.

The school's recently formed leadership team, following a range of new appointments, is working well. It has already brought about significant improvements in teaching and

learning. Leadership and management are good, and the team has set a clear agenda for improvement with the full involvement of the governing body. The school has a range of secure processes for analysing and making use of assessment data, reviewing subjects and checking the quality of teaching. Currently, however, it does not maximise the potential of these by combining the information gained to focus the work of the leadership team on the areas that most need improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Focus specifically, within the existing strong culture of achievement, on action that improves the motivation of boys who join the school with lower attainment.
- Combine the information gained through self-evaluation about pupils' progress, subject performance and the quality of teaching to set a sharper focus for the work of the leadership team on areas where challenge and support are most needed.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards as pupils leave the school are a little above average and this represents good achievement from year groups which have joined the school with fewer higher attaining pupils than is typical. However, this judgement of 'broadly average' underplays the success of the leadership team over the last two years in improving standards. In Years 7 to 9, for example, the school's strong focus on improving teaching and learning has resulted in rapid improvements in standards to become above average in 2005, with significant further improvements in 2006 in mathematics and science, especially at the higher levels. This was not reflected in English, however, where pupils unexpectedly underperformed in the national test in 2006, although this has not prevented continued good progress in Year 10. The school's own data indicate that pupils make good progress in other subjects.

The school's focus on improving teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 has had an impact on standards in several subjects, such as English, mathematics and science, which showed steady improvement up to 2005. Most pupils secured results that showed good achievement overall. The improvement has been sustained in 2006, when pupils' average point scores rose again and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades was sustained at a very high level. Variations between subjects meant the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more higher grades (A\* to C) dipped slightly. Specific interventions by the leadership team, for example, in music, have brought about considerable improvement in results. In some other subjects, such as German, the school's evaluation has not diagnosed fully the causes of relatively weaker performance.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils show a confidence and maturity that fits them well for future life. Both in moving around the school and in lessons, they relate to each other and to adults well. Mutual respect between pupils and staff is strong. As one Year 10 pupil commented, 'They have respect back for you.' Given their enjoyment of school, it is not surprising that pupils' behaviour and attendance are both good. Pupils feel safe and secure while at school. They do not see bullying as an issue, and any that does occur is dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Teachers are also good at dealing with any minor disruptions in lessons so that learning can continue. Pupils understand the need for safe practices in, for example, science, and carry them out readily. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with improvements since the last inspection. The way pupils are prepared for living and working in a multicultural society is satisfactory and is not as fully developed as it might be.

The school's focus on health and fitness has had a considerable impact, especially among younger pupils. Pupils' take up of sports activities is high, they make healthy choices of food, although the move to healthier meals is not as popular with older pupils, and they have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy diet. The range of representatives from each tutor group on the school council, and for charity and sport, enables many to contribute to the working of the school and, through the school's charity work, to the wider community. Their commitment to the school indicates that even more pupils could take on responsibility than at present, helping to build confidence and enhance their preparation for future economic well-being, which is satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

The school's strong focus on improving teaching and learning is showing benefits in the good quality of learning to be found in all year groups. Teachers structure their lessons well and maintain a good pace. Pupils know what they are expected to learn and join in readily by answering questions and playing a full part in paired and group work. Relationships in lessons are good and support pupils' involvement. Teachers have high expectations and pupils are set challenging targets. The focus on meeting targets is supported by a good understanding among pupils about national assessment levels. Marking is good and informs pupils of where they are and what they need to do next. Information and communication technology is used well in some lessons, both in presentations and where pupils contribute more directly to the class's learning using an interactive whiteboard. Questioning of pupils is generally good, but does not always encourage the more extended responses that allow teachers to gain a clear view of pupils' understanding. Off-task activities by some boys are handled well by teachers, but nevertheless slow the pace of some lessons. The culture of learning and

achievement that is accepted by most pupils has not yet been adopted by all, particularly lower attaining boys.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is broad and meets pupils' needs well. Schemes of work are well developed in all subjects. The recent improvement in provision of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 has been successful, and standards in GCSE applied art and design and health and social care are well above target. Collaboration with other local schools and Dudley College has enabled a wider choice of courses to be introduced. The Pathway Two course has enabled some pupils who might not have benefited from full GCSE courses to find success in skill development in work-related areas.

Arrangements to support those with learning difficulties are good, with withdrawal carefully planned to ensure coverage of other lessons and support in place through learning assistants for time missed. The school's complex arrangements for provision of citizenship in Years 7 to 9 across all subjects of the curriculum, while satisfactory, demand much coordination and planning. Too much time is taken in checking that all strands of the course are covered which could be better used to improve its quality. Collective worship does not take place daily, as it should.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's processes for setting and checking up on challenging targets for individual pupils are a strength. They are backed by extensive data, good input from subjects and helpful review and guidance meetings with tutors. As a result, pupils are well aware of what they need to do to be successful, and nearly all rise to the challenge. Those pupils with learning difficulties are well supported through withdrawal for intensive literacy teaching and in-class help from teaching assistants. Other vulnerable pupils are also well supported. Pupils more generally speak positively about the help they receive from tutors, heads of year and the leadership team, which stems from the school's caring approach. Careers guidance is secure, and makes good use of learning mentors.

Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety are good, and site security has improved since recent work was completed. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and follow national guidelines.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Recent changes in senior staff have enabled the headteacher and governors to build a new team of senior leaders who work well together. They share a clear common purpose to raise standards through improving teaching and learning. This renewed enthusiasm has revitalised senior leadership in the school and has helped to engage

subject and year group leaders in a common journey of improvement. The school's use of data to support the individual setting of targets is very good, and it uses further extensive data about the performance of subjects to drive improvement. Senior leaders also engage subject leaders well in annual reviews to construct subject development plans that influence the whole-school improvement plan. A third strand, regular checks on the quality of teaching, has accurately identified areas of strength and where improvement is needed, and action has been taken where needed to bring about improvement. While all these elements are secure, the school has not taken the opportunity to bring them together to sharpen the diagnosis of what is needed, to involve subject leaders more routinely in accounting for the quality of subject teaching, or to match observation and subject review with data to pinpoint priorities for improvement.

The senior team has, nevertheless, used the information it has to target improvement successfully, as in English, mathematics, science and music. The improvements in standards in these subjects, and the way curriculum developments have brought about similar improvement, show that the leadership team has good capacity to improve the school still further. Members of the team are highly self-critical and, while their understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses is good, they have been reluctant to accept how successful the school has become, grading its effectiveness only satisfactory. Their drive and determination to bring about further improvement, however, is undiminished and they use the school's resources effectively to do this. Pupils' and parents' views are sought regularly and these also feed into decisions about priorities for the school improvement plan.

The governing body exercises its role well, receiving good quality reports on all aspects of the school on a regular basis, challenging the staff to explain further where such explanation is needed. Some challenges have proved unnecessary because the leadership team has already prepared further material in support, again reflecting the good leadership and management of the school.



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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for finding the time to speak with Ms Wheatley and me during the recent inspection of your school. We spoke with a good number of you in lessons, between lessons and in our lunchtime discussions and we gained much from what you told us. We really appreciated how open you were with us and how ready you were to tell us how you felt about the school.

At the end of our day in the school, we decided that yours is a good school. We saw mature and confident young people throughout the school who enjoy learning, behave well and achieve well. You respond well to the good teaching you get and take part enthusiastically in lessons and in out-of-school activities. The school is well managed and teachers and other staff support you well in many ways, especially if you have a problem. The way you and your teachers make use of your individual targets is a particular strength.

We have asked the staff and governors to look closely at two areas that would help the school get even better. The first of these is for the leadership team to put together all the information they have about how well you are doing with what they know about the success of different subjects to decide where the team should provide most help.

The second applies mostly to boys, and we have asked the leadership team to find out why some boys do not want to take part in lessons as much as others, and to see whether any changes are needed to help those boys join in more. The boys among you can help in this, of course, by recognising how important it is for you to make the most of your time at school so that you do as well as you possibly can. With everyone taking part equally, we are sure all of you will do even better.

Thank you again for speaking with us and for the help you gave us with the inspection.