

# Inspection of Dorchester Middle School

Queen's Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2HS

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Inspection dates: 13 and 14 June 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at 'DMS' are beginning to learn to 'ROAR.' Leaders have recently raised expectations of pupils to be 'Ready, Original, Ambitious, Respectful and Safe.' Most pupils are starting to live up to these values. However, a minority of pupils do not demonstrate enough respect towards others. Pupils sometimes overhear or experience derogatory language. Some pupils and parents report that staff do not deal with bullying well enough. As a result, too many pupils and parents are not confident that leaders apply expectations fairly and consistently.

Despite their concerns about the behaviour of some, most pupils like coming to school. They enjoy looking after the school chickens and earning 'stripes' for their achievements. However, expectations of pupils' learning are not consistently high. Consequently, pupils do not have positive attitudes to learning at times.

Pupils enjoy wider opportunities. For example, they take up positions of responsibility. Pupils appreciate having a voice through voting opportunities, such as choosing charities to support. Pupils are involved in range of clubs, which include music and sport.

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

Leaders have started to make improvements to the curriculum, but much of this work is in its infancy. In some subjects, leaders have not planned precisely the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. In these subjects, pupils do not develop detailed knowledge and skills cumulatively over time.

Teachers do not always have the subject knowledge they need to teach the curriculum well. Leaders have started to provide professional development to enhance the quality of teaching, but this has not led to sufficient improvements. Consequently, teaching is not consistently designed to help pupils remember key knowledge. Teachers' use of assessment does not routinely identify where gaps exist in pupils' learning of the curriculum or correct their misconceptions. As a result, too many pupils do not build their learning on what they already know and can do.

Pupils typically enjoy reading and listening to their teachers read. However, pupils in the early stages of learning to read do not receive the support they need. They do not always learn the sounds they need to read accurately. They do not read books which help them to remember these sounds. Therefore, too many pupils do not have a strong foundation in reading. This hinders their learning in the rest of the curriculum.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those in the specialist resource base, follow the same curriculum as their peers. For some pupils with SEND, suitable adaptations are made to meet their needs. However, some pupils' needs are not identified precisely enough. Where this is the case,

teachers do not have the information they need to adapt the curriculum successfully. Leaders have started to introduce strategies to help pupils who have specific behavioural needs. However, these strategies have not yet had the impact that leaders intend.

Pupils are punctual and typically follow routines well. Pupils have good attendance. Leaders carefully respond to local and national trends. For example, they recognised the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pupils' well-being. Consequently, they place a strong emphasis on supporting pupils' mental health.

Pupils are supported in their wider development. They learn about healthy relationships in ways appropriate to their age. For example, older pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of consent. Pupils learn about democracy and how to be active citizens. They are encouraged to appreciate and value people's differences. Most pupils are polite and have respectful discussions with each other.

Pupils receive useful careers information and guidance. They learn about next steps in their education and about a range of future opportunities in education and employment. Leaders carefully evaluate the careers curriculum and make improvements when required.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Most feel well supported with their workload and well-being. Leaders have an accurate understanding of what the school needs to improve. Trustees, local governors and trust leaders are beginning to challenge and support leaders to bring about these improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils are safe. They learn how to keep themselves safe when online. The school has suitable policy and practice to manage cases of harmful sexual behaviour that may arise in or out of school.

Leaders understand relevant local risks to children and provide suitable training to staff. Leaders take effective action to help protect children. They make timely referrals to safeguarding partners and work closely with external agencies.

Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are made on adults working in the school. Where required, leaders manage allegations against staff well.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In some subjects, leaders have not defined precisely enough the knowledge and skills that are important for pupils to learn. Consequently, pupils do not build the

depth of knowledge that they need. Leaders need to ensure that curriculum planning identifies what pupils need to learn and by when so that pupils are supported to build detailed subject knowledge over time.

- The curriculum for pupils in the early stages of learning to read is not effective enough. Too many pupils do not gain a secure enough foundation in reading. This hinders their learning across the curriculum. Leaders need to have a sharp focus on ensuring all pupils gain the phonic knowledge required to read accurately and fluently.
- The needs of some pupils with SEND are not identified accurately enough. As a result, the curriculum for these pupils is not adapted in a way that supports them to learn well. Leaders should ensure that all pupils' needs are met so that they learn the curriculum successfully.
- A minority of pupils do not demonstrate enough respect for others. When these pupils' poor behaviour persists, it undermines pupils' and parents' confidence in the school. Leaders should ensure that their expectations are upheld fairly and consistently, so that all pupils learn to behave respectfully.

## 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](#)' 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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| <b>Unique reference number</b>             | 138186  |
| <b>Local authority</b>                     | Dorset  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                   | 10256705  |
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Middle deemed secondary   |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Academy converter   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 9 to 13   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 581   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | Board of trustees   |
| <b>Chair of trust</b>                      | Garry Batt  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Caroline Pluck  |
| <b>Website</b>                             | <a href="http://www.dorchestermid.dorset.sch.uk">http://www.dorchestermid.dorset.sch.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>         | 21 and 22 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005                               |

## Information about this school

- The school is part of the Wessex Multi-Academy Trust.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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 held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, curriculum leaders, members of the board of trustees and trust executive leadership team, and members of the local governing body.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum planning, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector scrutinised the single central record of adults working in the school. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and examined the school's safeguarding records. Inspectors also spoke with a range of pupils and staff about safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online Ofsted Parent View survey, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and to Ofsted's online pupil survey.

### **Inspection team**

James Oldham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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