

# Dowdales School

Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria LA15 8AH

## Inspection dates

9–10 July 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Dowdales is a proud, thriving and ambitious community. Leaders aim high and lead by example.
- The improved quality of teaching leads pupils to achieve well in many subjects, including science, English, mathematics, citizenship, humanities and modern foreign languages.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are making stronger progress than previously in key stage 4 and good progress in key stage 3.
- Boys' achievement has significantly improved since last year and in some subjects, boys now outperform girls. However, the engagement and progress of boys across the curriculum remain inconsistent.
- Pupils behave well. Typically, pupils are polite, conscientious, and proud of their school. This is a close-knit community where pupils are well known and well cared for.
- Attendance has improved since the inspection in January, but there is still work to do, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- There is a good level of challenge for pupils with high prior attainment in the vast majority of lessons.
- Leaders and governors invest heavily in the curriculum. Pupils benefit from Dowdales being a lead associate school for the Royal Shakespeare Company and the North North West Mathematics Hub.

## Full report

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

- Ensure that boys make the same good progress across all subjects, by:
  - sharing good practice in the implementation of the curriculum for this group
  - making certain that high-prior-attaining boys are always challenged in their learning.
- Improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher provides strong and resilient leadership. Her vision is forward thinking and her approach outward looking, while maintaining the proud traditions of everything 'Dowdalian'. Teachers are rightly proud of their school. Leaders and governors have responded rapidly and robustly to the 2018 dip in outcomes and the recommendations from the monitoring visit in November 2018.
- There is great integrity in the work of the senior leadership team, with a central focus on what is right for the pupils. The team is dynamic; members have designed a curriculum with the local, national and international labour market in mind. Science, engineering, performing arts, dance and music are all strengths of the school.
- Professional development is plentiful and well focused on school priorities. It has led to improvements in mathematics teaching and standards over the past few years. Leaders have then shared their expertise with other schools. Middle leaders are passionate about their subjects and monitor their departments well, which has led to improved outcomes.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium is used well to provide small-group tuition, expert teaching support and one-to-one intervention. As a result, the vast majority of pupils reach age-related expectations by the end of Year 7.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide enhanced careers information, advice and guidance for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, on leaving Dowdales, the proportion of pupils not in education, employment or training is below the national average.
- A proportion of pupil premium funding last year was allocated to improve attendance for disadvantaged pupils. While there has been some improvement, it is limited. Leaders and governors are acutely aware that it needs to improve more rapidly.
- The local authority has provided effective support to leaders and additional funding to support the recommendations from the last inspection. There has been a lot of effective collaborative work with local primary schools to ensure that pupils make more rapid progress in Year 7.
- The local authority has regularly reviewed the school's progress with senior members of staff and provided additional support for literacy and numeracy. It has supported leaders to make positive improvements to the school day to benefit disadvantaged pupils and to work more closely with some hard-to-reach families.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. There is a clear intent and vision for what pupils are to gain from it. It retains a lot of long-established strengths, including in the arts. The curriculum for high-prior-attainers has been improved in each year group, which has in turn improved outcomes. The school has reviewed and adapted the curriculum for Year 7 high-prior-attaining pupils. As a result, the progress of this group has accelerated. There remains a minority of lessons where there is insufficient challenge for boys, particularly those with high prior attainment.

- Pupils spoken to by inspectors say that they are happy with their option choices. Many pupils take advantage of the plethora of sporting, musical, theatrical and scientific enrichment activities on offer. There is a range of suitable pathways for pupils with SEND or with other specific needs.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a strength of the school. Inspectors observed a Year 9 and Year 10 assembly that focused on Wimbledon and stressed the importance of performance, presentation and training.
- Dowdales holds the British Council International School Award and has links with a number of European cities. Pupils visit schools across the world to explore and share opportunities. Closer to home, pupils raise money for charity, go litter picking and work on recycling and sustainability. In recent years, they have run trips to Nepal and Malaysia to help with community projects.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors know the school well and offer a good balance of challenge and support to leaders at all levels. They understand the quality of provision through scrutiny of departmental reviews and learning walks. Minutes of governors' meetings show a good level of challenge and close monitoring of the school's work.
- Governors have worked closely with the attendance team to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. They have supported the school in various strategies to overcome barriers to attendance for pupils who travel some distance to school.
- Governors have been prudent in financial planning so as to ensure the school's future financial security. In the light of this, they have recently overseen a number of voluntary redundancies. They regularly review policies and arrangements for health and safety.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff have been well trained and know what to do should they be concerned about the welfare of any pupil. Child protection concerns are followed up in a timely manner.
- Necessary checks on the staff who work in the school are carried out. The leaders with particular responsibility for safeguarding work well with a range of agencies in securing the correct support for pupils. There has been a focus upon early intervention to build pupils' positive mental health. Staff training on county lines and drug misuse has been used effectively to support and alert pupils.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Typically, there are high expectations of what pupils can achieve. In the vast majority of subjects, teachers set challenging tasks that enable pupils to do well. Teachers' planning ensures that the needs of different groups of pupils are met, including for those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND. Pupils with SEND make strong progress as a result of effective teaching.

- Work scrutiny and lesson observations showed that the quality of teaching for the most able pupils has improved considerably since the previous inspection. For example, inspectors observed Year 9 pupils who were highly engaged in a science lesson, learning about radioactive substances. Challenging subject-specific terminology was used alongside searching questions to ensure that there was a good depth of recall and understanding.
- Teachers and pupils display strong subject knowledge which leads to high engagement and the correct use of subject terminology. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted well, for example through the religious studies and citizenship curriculum. Pupils are regularly challenged to think about social justice, human rights, equalities and more, which helps them develop a strong moral purpose.
- Improving the quality of teaching for boys has been a key focus for leaders over the past year. Inspectors observed many examples of boys engrossed in their learning because of a highly effective curriculum. For example, in a Year 10 engineering lesson, boys were industrious in producing bench hooks. They had to work as a team under time pressure to produce items to meet stringent requirements. Boys said that they worked hard in engineering because they knew that they needed these skills to be successful in the local labour market.
- High proportions of boys opt for modern foreign languages at the end of key stage 3. Scrutiny of their work and observation of lessons showed high engagement, good use of the target language and strong recall.
- While the quality of teaching for girls and boys is highly effective much of the time, there remain examples of teaching where boys are not engaged as they should be: they are off task and interrupt the learning of others. This is often because the work is not challenging enough for them.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils spoken to by inspectors say that they feel safe in school and bullying is uncommon. Pupils are confident that there are a number of staff whom they could turn to for help if they needed it. They know that different forms of bullying, including homophobic language, are unacceptable.
- Leaders have invested a lot of time in supporting pupils' mental health. This has led to high levels of awareness and an increasing number of pupils accessing support. Similarly, e-safety has a high profile in school and mobile phones are not allowed.
- Leaders ensure that the personal development and welfare of the few pupils attending alternative educational provision are well catered for. Leaders daily monitor pupils' welfare and well-being.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions has reduced significantly in recent years. This is because the school is more inclusive and caters well for all pupils, but especially those with SEND and those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- At social times, pupils conduct themselves well with little supervision; their behaviour is largely self-regulating. It is commonplace for pupils to show good manners, holding the door open and speaking politely to adults, guests and each other.
- The vast majority of behaviour in lessons is good, attentive and considerate. In a small minority of lessons, pupils report and inspectors observed boys who were off task and having their own conversations when they were not challenged by the work or were not interested in it.
- Although attendance has improved, overall attendance remains below the national average and it is lower still for disadvantaged pupils. Levels of persistent absence remain above the national average.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Current assessment data shows that the proportion of pupils achieving a strong pass in English and mathematics is in line with the national average. Progress across the curriculum as seen in lesson observations and work scrutiny is typically good.
- The progress of pupils with high prior attainment is much improved. They now typically make good progress, most notably in modern foreign languages, English, biology, physics and chemistry.
- The difference in the outcomes for boys and girls has significantly diminished. Boys now outperform girls or do as well as them in the majority of subjects. There remains variation both within and between subjects when boys are not challenged or engaged by their learning.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND is improving in key stage 4. In key stage 3, these groups make good progress. Much of this is due to a concerted effort to strengthen progress in key stage 3, in particular in Year 7.
- Key stage 3 and key stage 4 targets for pupils are challenging and indicative of leaders' high expectations. More focused intervention this year has given greater synergy between English and mathematics.
- Careers information, advice and guidance is well planned and progress towards the Gatsby benchmarks is carefully monitored. It is anticipated that this year, all pupils will go on to further education, employment or training. Leaders have focused on developing careers advice in key stage 3 in order to continue to raise aspirations. This has had a very positive impact on engagement and outcomes.
- There are good links with a local construction company. Year 10 pupils are well prepared for working life through a series of workshops. There is a spotlight on alumni and regular visits to Russell Group universities, including Cambridge with which the

school has links. Weekly careers talks raise aspirations and include careers such as those in physiotherapy and biomedical science.

- There are three pupils who attend full-time alternative provision. Their progress and attendance are carefully monitored by the school.

## School details

Unique reference number	112383
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10091477

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	979
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Caren Hindle
Headteacher	Ms Julie O'Connor
Telephone number	01229 469800
Website	<a href="http://www.dowdalesschool.co.uk">www.dowdalesschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@dowdales.cumbria.sch.uk">office@dowdales.cumbria.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	20–21 November 2013

## Information about this school

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs support is below average and those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan is broadly average.
- The school has a predominantly White British population. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below the national average.
- This school has links with the following alternative providers: The Moorfield Centre and Drop Zone.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching across the school and carried out an extensive scrutiny of pupils' work, including that of pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised school policies and records relating to safeguarding, self-evaluation information and a range of other documentation.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff and pupils formally and at social times.
- Inspectors spoke with a representative from the local authority. Meetings were also held with senior and middle leaders.
- There were 91 responses to the pupil questionnaire. There were 82 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- There were 143 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to be considered and 79 free-text responses.

## Inspection team

Sally Kenyon, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Nell Banfield	Ofsted Inspector
Timothy Gartside	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Bell	Ofsted Inspector

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