

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Damers First School

Liscombe Street, Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 3DF

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 February 2025

Outcome

Damers First School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The head of school of this school is Louise Greenham. This school is part of Wessex Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Michael Foley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Baker. There is also an executive headteacher, Joseph Bell, who is responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Damers way of being, 'brave, unique, caring and kind', is the heartbeat of this inclusive school. Pupils know how this vision, alongside the school values, makes the school a happy place to be. Pupils enjoy coming to Damers and this is reflected in their high attendance. Staff build warm relationships with pupils so that they feel well looked after and confident that staff will help if they have any worries or concerns.

The school has designed a broad and ambitious curriculum. Staff have high expectations of what they want pupils to learn to prepare them well for their next stage. Pupils rise to these expectations and learn the curriculum successfully. They behave well and show respect towards others. They are enthusiastic about their learning and want to be successful. This starts in the early years where children are proud to share what they know about the world around them.

The school has carefully considered the wider curriculum for pupils. For example, a focus on sustainability and community is woven through the curriculum design. Pupils are proud of the difference they make both in school and beyond. For example, when learning about the rainforest, pupils wear green to raise awareness of the impact of deforestation.

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

Across subjects, the school has identified and sequenced the knowledge and vocabulary it wants pupils to know and remember. Subject leaders have exemplified this further to support staff in being clear about what to teach and when. This enables pupils to build their knowledge based on what they have learned before.

In lessons, pupils revisit prior learning to help secure knowledge into their long-term memory. Teachers explain new concepts clearly. They use effective questioning to help pupils to make links with their prior knowledge. As a result, pupils learn the curriculum well. For example, pupils have secured a depth of knowledge in science when describing states of matter using the correct scientific vocabulary.

The school makes checks on how well pupils have remembered previous learning before starting a new unit of study. It then checks again to identify and support any gaps in knowledge. However, on some occasions, these checks do not always identify where pupils have not secured important knowledge, such as accuracy of letter formation. These checks do not always lead to adjustments in the curriculum. As a result, some pupils build their knowledge less securely.

The school is ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to do well, including those pupils who are part of 'Copper Base'. These pupils benefit from bespoke support and adaptations to gain success in their learning. The school has a clear process to identify pupils with SEND. This starts in the early years with language assessments to check any gaps in children's language and communication. The school is strengthening the use of learning plans to help pupils with SEND to be more successful in their learning. However, on some occasions, the school does not use this information to adapt the curriculum well enough to support some pupils. As a result, these pupils are not securing important knowledge quickly enough.

The school prioritises the teaching of reading. It ensures staff have the knowledge and expertise to teach phonics well. This starts in the early years where teachers model clearly how to read and write new sounds that children record with accuracy. Pupils read books that match the sounds they know to help them to become fluent readers. The school promotes a love of reading through the 'heart space' library area. Pupils take pleasure in choosing books and sharing their favourites.

Pupils learn in a calm and orderly school. They are clear about the routines to help them learn successfully. Throughout lessons, pupils listen and respond well to the high expectations teachers have of them.

The school provides a range of opportunities to enhance the curriculum. Pupils value these, such as a recent trip to a museum to learn more about the Second World War. The school supports pupils to be active citizens through pupil leadership roles. For example, pupils in the 'school council' have purchased play equipment for lunchtimes, while the 'junior governors' are working on systems to help pupils to share any worries they may have.

The school, alongside the trust, are determined for all pupils to be successful. Those responsible for governance have an accurate view of the school. Alongside leaders, they are clear about the strengths and where there is further work to do.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On some occasions, the checks the school makes on how well some pupils are learning the curriculum do not accurately identify where these pupils need further support. As a result, they are not securing important knowledge and so they are less prepared for future learning. The trust must ensure that staff have the skills and expertise to identify pupils' gaps in knowledge and adjust future learning so that it helps these pupils to learn the curriculum well.
- Some pupils with SEND do not consistently benefit from precise support in learning plans to ensure that learning is adapted well enough. When this is the case, these pupils progress less well through the curriculum. The trust needs to continue strengthening the expertise of staff so that pupils with SEND gain from all the support they need to build their knowledge securely.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Damers First School, the school to be good for overall effectiveness in October 2017.

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

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| Unique reference number | 147559 |
| Local authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 10344830 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 476 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Martin Baker |
| CEO of the trust | Michael Foley |
| Headteacher | Louise Greenham |
| Website | www.damers.dorset.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- The school is part of Wessex Multi Academy Trust.
- The head of school took up her post in September 2023.
- The school operates a ten-place resourced provision called the 'Copper Base' for pupils with complex communication needs within the local authority. These pupils spend time in the resource base and they are integrated within the school when appropriate.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector spoke with school leaders, curriculum leaders, those responsible for governance and the CEO.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, heard some children read to a familiar adult and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, 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.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Additionally, the inspector spoke to pupils to discuss their views about the school.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils or staff.

Inspection team

Esther Best, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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