

Dorothy Stringer School

Loder Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 6PZ

Inspection dates

13–14 March 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, leaders and governors are focused on improving pupils' progress and achievements. Consequently, pupils' outcomes are improving in most subjects.
- Leaders have created a strong, inclusive school which supports and cares for all within its community.
- There is an effective learning culture across the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Pupils are typically well behaved in lessons and conduct themselves appropriately throughout the school day.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils feel safe and are kept safe because staff understand their responsibilities and know their pupils well.
- Recent changes to the curriculum have broadened the breadth and choices available to pupils at key stage 4.
- Most teachers plan engaging lessons. Activities are interesting, and appropriately challenge pupils of differing abilities to develop their knowledge and understanding. However, some teachers' expectations are too low, and they do not sufficiently develop pupils' skills.
- Senior leaders have invested time and resources into ensuring that pupils who join the school with weak literacy skills quickly catch up.
- Pupils achieve outcomes which are broadly in line with national averages. Some disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well in some subjects.
- Pupils make superb progress in English, modern foreign languages and humanities. This is because leaders regularly review progress and improve the quality of learning.
- A few leaders do not evaluate, as thoroughly as others, the impact of school improvement on pupils' progress. This has led to slow progress and inconsistent practice in, for example, mathematics and science.
- Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a strength. Pupils know how to manage their personal development and well-being.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fully integrated into all aspects of school life. Consequently, pupils understand diversity and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. However, some disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, do not attend school regularly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further strengthen leaders' evaluation of school improvement so that:
 - all can accurately identify which actions are improving pupils' progress
 - middle leaders routinely check the progress of different groups of pupils within year groups, so that appropriate support can be deployed when needed.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that:
 - all staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially in mathematics and science
 - disadvantaged pupils make consistently good progress.
- Ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities attend school regularly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's collaborative and reflective leadership ensures that he and his team are acutely aware of both the school's strengths and the areas for improvement. Leaders are keen that all pupils should make strong progress in all subjects. Leaders are working collectively with staff to share best practice so that further improvements can be made across subjects and year groups.
- Most subject leaders are keen to make improvements which will have an impact on pupils' attainment and progress. Effective leadership, for example in English, modern foreign languages and humanities, reviews the progress of different groups of pupils across all year groups. These leaders also share best practice within their departments to improve the quality of provision. Consequently, teachers systematically plan well-structured learning activities so that pupils' outcomes improve.
- Dorothy Stringer is a large school, and leaders have invested heavily in an effective team of pastoral staff, who ensure that pupils are well cared for. Some parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, identified particular heads of year, and the headteacher, as highly effective in resolving quickly any of their concerns. Year 11 pupils reported to inspectors that they were 'very well looked after'.
- Leaders have created a positive climate for learning through the 'Stringer learning culture'. This provides pupils with a clear understanding of how they should contribute to their learning at school and at home. Consequently, pupils know that to succeed they need to arrive in school ready to learn, work hard in lessons and on any additional work they are set, and behave well in class.
- There is a strong sense of equality and community at Dorothy Stringer School. Pupils show respect and care for each other, and are well aware of the need to respect others from different cultures and religions. There are very positive relationships between both staff and pupils. Year 10 pupils told inspectors that 'teachers really want you to succeed'.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders regularly review both key stages 3 and 4 to ensure that pupils continue to engage well in their subjects. Current Year 9 pupils appreciate the chance to focus on specific arts and design options, in line with possible careers.
- Pupils told inspectors that they value their PSHE lessons, their enjoyment of which was evident in their books. Pupils frequently complete pieces of extended writing, expressing their opinions on a variety of issues, including, for example, gender equality.
- The special educational needs coordinator has a variety of support programmes in place. This support helps pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to make good progress. Some of these programmes help develop pupils' literacy skills, so that they can access the curriculum successfully.
- Historically, those who are disadvantaged have not made the same gains as their peers in mathematics, science and some option subjects. Staff identified that some of these pupils felt marginalised. Consequently, leaders have recently prioritised this group,

ensuring that all staff know these pupils well. Currently, disadvantaged pupils who attend regularly make similar progress to their peers.

- Leaders' recent focus on developing stronger relationships with the families of pupils with low attendance has led to some pupils attending school more regularly. However, leaders responsible for monitoring attendance do not always check on which strategy is having a positive impact on pupils' attendance, so that they can extend its use. Leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improves, so that they can make similar progress to their peers.
- Leaders have given all pupils subject targets linked to their prior attainment. Information about pupils' progress is collected regularly. However, leaders agree that key stage 3 data in some subjects was inaccurate, and their analysis and evaluation of the progress of different groups needs to be sharper.
- Some leaders do not fully evaluate how successful some of their school improvement actions have been. This has limited the pace of change in a number of key areas, for example improving the quality of provision for mathematics so that more pupils make accelerated progress from Year 7.

Governance of the school

- Governors are very committed. They share the headteacher's vision that all Dorothy Stringer pupils will succeed academically, treat others with respect, know how to keep themselves safe and improve their well-being.
- Governors visit the school regularly, and can identify both the school's strengths and its weaknesses. They routinely check that the school's policies and procedures, for example on safeguarding, are accurate and being used effectively by staff.
- Governors appreciate the honest discussions with school leaders regarding school improvement. Governors challenge appropriately on actions taken to improve the progress of groups.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Appropriate checks are carried out to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. The recording of these checks meets statutory requirements.
- There is a school culture of keeping pupils safe. Staff are told to 'always refer' if they have any concerns. The school has several senior staff who have been trained to a high level in safeguarding. They use this expertise well to ensure that pupils who need extra support get the help they need. All staff are appropriately trained and understand their responsibilities. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know that if they have any concerns they can talk to a member of staff they trust. The vast majority of parents feel their children are safe at school.
- Leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils are well supported in school. Staff work very well with parents and the local authority to protect pupils in need of care and support.

- A few pupils expressed concerns about the public footpath on the school site. Leaders manage this stringently, and there is a strong staff presence at break and lunchtime to oversee the safety of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most teachers have high expectations of their pupils, and set challenging activities in lessons. In English, modern foreign languages and humanities, teachers consistently plan focused learning activities. These are pitched appropriately to challenge all pupils, irrespective of their starting points. These teachers use their strong subject knowledge to question and check on pupils' understanding. Pupils are typically attentive and enthusiastic about their learning. They respond well to teachers' verbal and written feedback, which is provided in line with the school policy. As a result, pupils make good progress.
- Strong teaching develops pupils' evaluation skills, so that they can critically assess their progress. This was particularly evident in some photography, drama, art and physical education lessons, where pupils discussed with inspectors how they could further improve their work.
- Nurture groups provide additional support for pupils with weak literacy skills across all year groups. Those in Years 7 and 8 receive particularly effective support to improve their reading and comprehension. These intense learning sessions ensure that pupils develop effective communication skills. As a result, pupils with low literacy skills in Year 7 often excel in English by the end of key stage 4.
- Pupils' learning is further enriched by a large number of extra-curricular activities. For example, inspectors saw many pupils actively engaged in sporting activities prior to the school day. Pupils told inspectors that they also enjoy contributing to school plays and musical productions. Staff actively encourage all pupils to be involved in additional activities.
- Teachers use the school's 'Stringer learning culture' well to create a calm and orderly learning environment. Pupils' positive conduct in lessons ensures that they typically listen well to others, follow instructions when asked and engage in their learning.
- The progress pupils make in their lessons, including those who are disadvantaged, is directly related to how often they attend school and the quality of teaching. Where teaching is less effective, for example in some mathematics and science lessons, teachers set pupils activities which either lack challenge or are not sufficiently engaging. Some teachers do not recognise this, and do not adjust their activities to compensate.
- Careers education runs from Year 7 to Year 11. Pupils receive impartial careers advice and guidance. The careers programme appropriately supports pupils' next steps to post-16 provision, apprenticeships or employment.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pastoral staff and the PSHE coordinator have developed a comprehensive programme. This ensures that pupils are extremely well informed of the dangers associated with, for example, drugs, alcohol and unprotected sex. Pupils know how to keep themselves healthy and safe. Pupils are encouraged to discuss any concerns with school counsellors and staff. As a result of some of these discussions, additional staff and further support has been put into place to help pupils with particular mental health issues, with impressive results.
- Many subjects, including religious studies, successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by significantly enhancing pupils' understanding of a wide variety of cultures.
- Pupils enjoy being part of this highly inclusive school community. They recognise that discussions about equality and prejudice help them to understand others' individuality. Consequently, they know and value the diversity in British society, and respect differences.
- Pastoral leaders and tutors know their pupils very well. Pupils take full advantage of tutor time to read and to be aware of local, national and world issues. As a result, pupils are exceptionally well informed about current affairs and are positively encouraged to discuss and share their views in class. For example, in one Year 9 tutor group, all pupils were engaged in discussing inequality in pay for some women.
- An alternative programme of support has recently been introduced for pupils with poor attendance or behaviour. This is helping pupils to identify what is preventing them from coming to school, or how they need to modify their behaviour, so that they can return to their normal lessons. This has resulted in a considerable reduction in individual pupils' poor behaviour.
- A few pupils with complex emotional, behavioural and mental health issues attend a pupil referral unit locally. This is helping them to use strategies to manage their own behaviour and improve their well-being. Those who attend the unit are checked on routinely by school leaders.
- Pupils are well known by a number of staff. Senior and pastoral teams have a very clear understanding of which pupils have poor attitudes to learning. Regular discussions take place with pupils to encourage all to have a positive approach to their studies. This has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of pupils gaining awards for strong attitudes to learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have adopted the school's values and culture, so that they typically display strong conduct. Most pupils show positive attitudes to learning.

- The attendance of pupils is slightly below the national average. The vast majority of pupils arrive on time and are ready to learn in every lesson. However, a small group of pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, continue to have poor attendance. Additional support staff are working with parents and carers to coax pupils back to school. Leaders recognise that further work is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies to ensure that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, attend school more regularly.
- Parents and pupils told inspectors that bullying is dealt with effectively when reported. The school's records show a significant reduction in poor behaviour and bullying incidents since the introduction of 'Stringer learning culture'. A few parents expressed concern that some incidents were not always dealt with quickly enough. However, inspectors found no evidence to substantiate this.
- The school has grown in size significantly over a number of years, and the original building was built to accommodate fewer pupils than the numbers who currently attend. Despite this, movement between lessons is well managed. Pupils generally are polite and kind to one another.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- A large percentage of pupils join Dorothy Stringer School having achieved above age-related expectations at key stage 2. In 2017, 75% of Year 11 pupils gained a pass in both their GCSE English and mathematics exams, and almost 60% gained a strong pass in both subjects. This is well above the national average. However, some disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities attained outcomes below their peers with similar starting points. Pupils with low prior attainment made weak progress in mathematics.
- In 2017, key stage 4 pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, typically made strong progress in English and modern foreign languages. These pupils achieved almost half a grade above others with similar starting points. However, in a few other subjects, for example in health and social care or design technology, pupils typically made weak progress. School leaders have responded to these outcomes.
- Pupils' workbooks looked at by inspectors during the inspection show current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, who attend school regularly, typically make good progress in most subjects. Where pupils are more engaged in their learning activities, they make stronger progress over time. Pupils with poor attendance develop gaps in their learning and understanding and they quickly fall behind.
- Catch-up funding is used well to ensure that pupils with low literacy skills make accelerated progress. Most Year 7 pupils involved in the programme are now accessing the complete curriculum in Year 8. They can now read much more fluently, and understand their literacy activities in lessons. Historically, pupils involved in the numeracy catch-up programme have been less successful. A new 'mastery' programme is being developed to rectify this for 2018.
- Leaders monitor closely the progress of Year 11 pupils, so that extra support can be provided when needed. However, the monitoring and evaluation of progress across key stage 3 is less effective. Consequently, some pupils, including those who are

disadvantaged, are not always identified or supported as quickly as they could be, for example in key stage 3 mathematics.

- The few pupils who attend the pupil referral unit are learning well how to manage their emotions, while further developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Current Year 11 pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making stronger progress in a range of subjects, including mathematics and science, due to improved provision. Additional support is provided for some pupils, and 'hot topics' are revisited to ensure that pupils reach their targets. Current school data indicates outcomes will be stronger in 2018.

School details

Unique reference number	114580
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10041461

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1653
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Jenny Poore
Headteacher	Richard Bradford
Telephone number	01273 852 222
Website	www.gateway.dorothy-stringer.co.uk
Email address	head@dorothy-stringer.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 December 2013

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The vast majority of the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have support for SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is also above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is below the national average.
- A few pupils are educated off-site at Brighton and Hove pupil referral unit, Lynchet Close, Brighton.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 55 lessons to observe learning across a range of subjects and year groups. Most of these lessons were visited jointly with members of the school's leadership team.
- Inspectors met with pupils from all year groups in tutor groups, meetings, in lessons and informally around the school. They also listened to a group of Year 7 pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' written work across a range of abilities, subjects and year groups.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders, as well as representatives of the governing body. They also spoke to the local authority school improvement partner.
- Inspectors considered the school's policies, including those for safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, pupil premium and SEN. They reviewed the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. They also looked at records relating to current pupils' progress and attendance, as well as behaviour and exclusion logs.
- Inspectors reviewed 362 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 302 responses from parents on Ofsted's free-text service. They also took account of the responses from staff and pupils' online surveys.

Inspection team

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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