

Inspection of Dixons Unity Academy

Whingate Road, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS12 3DS

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 July 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

The principal of this school is Ash Jacobs. There is also an executive principal, Jason Patterson, who is responsible for the school. This school is part of Dixons Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Luke Sparkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mike Blackburn.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. These expectations are being increasingly well realised. Pupils experience consistent routines and common approaches to teaching. This creates a strong focus on learning. Staff are particularly mindful of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are acquiring greater knowledge and skills than was previously the case.

Pupils benefit from orderly classrooms and improving behaviour on site. The majority of pupils respond to the clear expectations that staff set. Leaders address and record any instances of bullying or poor behaviour. Despite this, some pupils and their parents remain concerned about bullying.

The school is working ever more closely with pupils and their families to improve attendance. There are signs that this is beginning to improve. Nevertheless, overall attendance is too low and too many pupils are persistently absent.

The school is building stronger links with the wider community. The 'Unity Community' provides extra support to pupils and families, helping to address the barriers that some face.

Pupils learn the importance of respect. The school is taking increasing steps to widen pupils' personal development. Pupils receive thorough guidance on their next steps for future education, employment or training.

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

Leaders have taken significant action to improve the quality of education. They have provided comprehensive training for staff. This means that staff are better equipped to help pupils to learn the intended curriculum. Staff model new learning well to enable pupils to understand new content. They provide appropriate support to help pupils to develop their responses to questions and tasks. Staff carry out regular checks to see how well pupils have understood emerging ideas. Although there remains some variation in how well these learning strategies are used, there is an increasing consistency across all departments.

The impact of improved routines for learning is reflected in pupils' increasing understanding. In mathematics, pupils build knowledge carefully from key stage 3 to key stage 4. In history, pupils can recall important knowledge from previous topics. For example, pupils were able to discuss to what extent the Elizabethan Age was a 'Golden Age' in perceptive and considered ways. Current pupils are experiencing a curriculum across many subjects that is much more securely implemented than before. The quality of this learning is not reflected in the weak outcomes of previous cohorts.

Leaders foreground the needs of pupils with SEND. Staff receive training to help them to recognise the needs of pupils with SEND. They use SEND information to closely inform their teaching. This is leading to stronger progress for pupils with SEND.

Leaders have invested significant resource in the setting up of the school's own alternative provision, 'Connect'. Pupils benefit from high levels of pastoral and academic support. Pupils in 'Connect' access a broad curriculum, with extra support for their individual needs. This support is beginning to improve attendance and reduce suspensions for these pupils. Leaders ensure that the small number of pupils accessing external providers are safe and well supported.

The school is enhancing pupils' personal development. Pupils learn about healthy relationships through the personal, social and health education programme. Pupils are taught about respect and the importance of the rule of law. At the time of the inspection, pupils were taking part in a mock general election as they explored the democracy. Leaders provide pupils with a strong careers programme to 'keep aspirations on track'. This programme builds coherently, with Year 10 pupils offered a careers interview with a local employer. Strong pastoral support and the school's own counselling and emotional support is helping more vulnerable pupils to engage.

Leaders have clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. These are largely met in classrooms and at social times. There is an emphasis on positive relationships, with pupils receiving a warm welcome at the start of lessons. Suspensions for poor behaviour are declining but remain high. Leaders act in response to any incidents of bullying. Nevertheless, pupils remain concerned by aspects of bullying and the behaviour of some of their peers.

Leaders have intensified actions to overcome barriers to attendance. They are building stronger links with families. School staff have made over 550 home visits since January. Despite these intensive efforts, attendance remains stubbornly low.

Leaders at all levels have taken significant action to improve the quality of education for all pupils. The trust has invested considerable resources into the school, with key staff supporting improvement. Trustees, and the academy improvement board, keep a close eye on school improvement. The school is supporting and engaging the local community to involve all stakeholders in school improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some variation in how well agreed learning strategies are used to check and deepen pupils' understanding. This contributes to variable progress for some

pupils. The school should work with staff to refine the implementation of the curriculum to deepen pupils' learning.

- The school's high expectations for behaviour are not fully realised. Some pupils are concerned by the poor behaviour of their peers and suspensions remain high. The school should continue to work with pupils to help them to better manage their behaviour and show respect for all their peers.
- Although attendance is beginning to improve, too many pupils are absent and persistently absent from school. This means that they miss out on the improving quality of education on offer. The school should further embed their attendance improvement strategies so that pupils can benefit from the academic and pastoral support available to them.

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 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

Unique reference number	146363
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10325043
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	909
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Blackburn
Principal	Ash Jacobs
Website	www.dixonsua.com
Date of previous inspection	19 March 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Dixons Academies Trust in October 2018.
- The school opened its own on-site alternative provision, 'Connect', in January 2024.
- The school uses three registered providers of alternative provision and one unregistered provider on a part-time basis.
- The principal joined the school in January 2023. Several new leaders have joined the school since the previous inspection. These include an executive principal and an assistant vice-principal with responsibility for alternative provision. New subject leaders are in post in mathematics, physical education and business and information technology. A new special educational needs coordinator has been appointed as part of an expanded inclusion team. The school has appointed additional staff to the pastoral team and added capacity to the attendance team.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, including the chief executive officer of the trust and a representative of the trust board. They reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes of the trust board and the academy improvement board.
- To evaluate the quality of education, deep dives were carried out in English, history, mathematics, physical education and science. Inspectors spoke with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at a sample of pupils' work and spoke with some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also reviewed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: 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 views of staff were considered through formal and informal meetings with staff and through their responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils through formal and informal discussions.

Inspection team

Malcolm Kirtley, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Gill Senior	Ofsted Inspector
Tony Guise	Ofsted Inspector
Lynette Edwards	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Evans	Ofsted Inspector

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