

Inspection of Dixons Unity Academy

Whingate Road, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS12 3DS

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Dixons Unity Academy do not benefit from a high-quality education. Pupils have very limited opportunities to develop their knowledge and interests in subjects such as design technology or food technology. The quality of pupils' learning experiences in lessons is variable. Outcomes in external examinations are weak in many subjects.

Too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Rates of attendance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are particularly low.

Pupils with SEND do not routinely benefit from appropriate support. Their needs are not consistently being identified or met. Some pupils attend alternative provision. Most of these are pupils with SEND. For a number of these pupils, the school's use of alternative provision is not helping to improve their learning and/or behaviour.

Pupils feel safe at school. Most are happy. They have adults to talk to in times of need. Although incidents of bullying occasionally happen, pupils feel that staff deal with them appropriately. While day-to-day behaviour in lessons is often calm, a high number of pupils continues to be removed from lessons or suspended from school for poor behaviour.

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

The school has been part of the Dixons Academies Trust for just less than five years. Leaders have had some success during this time. For example, the number of pupils on roll has increased rapidly. However, there continue to be areas of significant improvement that need to be addressed. Some school improvement initiatives have been impacted by the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There have been many staffing changes in recent years. This includes changes to teachers, support staff, subject leaders and senior leaders. At the time of this inspection, a small number of new subject leaders had been appointed but had not yet started. Some lessons are currently being taught by non-specialists or temporary staff as leaders work to appoint new staff to teaching posts. This instability in staffing is preventing some school improvement priorities from gathering momentum. However, several staff members consider the arrival of a new principal, who took up post in spring 2023, to mark a turning point. They say that he is bringing in much-needed energy and clarity. Staff say that leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being.

There are weaknesses in the curriculum offer. Pupils have limited opportunities to study technology subjects. Some pupils and their parents are disappointed about this.

Leaders have brought in, and adapted, curriculum plans from other schools in the trust. These plans outline the most important content for staff to teach in individual topics. However, this practice is not used to consistent effect. In mathematics, there

is no formal plan for what teachers should teach in Year 11. Too often, teachers rely too narrowly on the teaching and assessment of past examination papers rather than focusing on the key mathematical knowledge that pupils need to know.

In some important areas of the curriculum, there are weaknesses in how well it is implemented. Pupils are not consistently supported to remember important content from their lessons. The work pupils are asked to complete does not routinely enable them to demonstrate or deepen their understanding. As a result of this, many pupils do not develop sufficient knowledge in their subjects and do not achieve well.

Many pupils with SEND are not well supported in school. Leaders are aware that more needs to be done to identify the specific learning needs of these pupils. Staff have not had enough training on how to support pupils with SEND. Staff and leaders do not engage effectively with parents of pupils with SEND. However, the school's in-house well-being team works well with local agencies to provide effective support for pupils needing emotional support.

Leaders provide appropriate support for pupils who are not yet fluent readers. This includes intervention programmes and catch-up sessions in reading. They have a range of plans in place to expand this support and ensure more pupils benefit from it.

Behaviour in classrooms is routinely calm and orderly. This allows teachers to teach and pupils to learn. When incidents of poor behaviour occur, leaders support staff to respond to these effectively. However, the frequency of pupils removed from lessons for poor behaviour, although falling, remains high. In addition, leaders are aware that the number of suspensions from school for poor behaviour needs to reduce.

Through the school's personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from some of the risks that they may face in society. However, some older pupils want to know more about issues such as healthy relationships, sexual health and the importance of sexual consent. Pupils receive relevant careers information to help them plan for their next steps in life.

Thirty-five pupils currently attend a range of alternative providers of education. Most of these are pupils with SEND. While some placements are proving to be effective, other placements are not helping to secure improvements for pupils in areas such as behaviour, attendance and learning. Some pupils at alternative provision access a very limited curriculum. These pupils are not well prepared for life after school. The oversight that leaders have of the pupils at alternative provision is weak. Not enough has been done to check that these placements are having a positive impact on pupils.

Governors and trustees are mindful of their statutory duties. They are aware that more needs to be done to improve the school. Although some parents who responded to the inspection survey gave positive comments, over half said that they would not recommend the school. Many of the concerns they raise align with the

findings from this inspection. The new principal has a clear plan in place to improve engagement with the community that the school serves. There are also plans to expand the role of the pupil leadership team and to gather pupils' views more regularly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training and updates. Leaders ensure that staff are aware of the local safeguarding priorities. A weekly bulletin is used to remind staff about what to look out for to keep pupils safe and how to handle concerns about pupils' safety or welfare.

Leaders keep detailed records of their work to support pupils who need help. This includes pupils who attend alternative provision. Leaders work with external agencies when necessary.

Appropriate recruitment checks are taken to ensure that staff in school are safe to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not access a broad range of subjects. They have very limited opportunities to develop their knowledge and interests in subjects such as design technology or food technology. Leaders must review pupils' access to these areas of the curriculum, ensuring that they are provided with learning opportunities that are at least similar in breadth and ambition to that found in the national curriculum.
- The needs of pupils with SEND are not routinely identified. Their needs are not well met in some areas of the curriculum. As such, many pupils with SEND do not benefit from a good-quality education. Leaders should ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are identified and consistently well met.
- Pupils are not routinely helped to remember and recall the most important content from their subjects. This leads to gaps in their understanding. These gaps are further reflected in the weak outcomes achieved by many pupils in external examinations in many subjects. This limits the extent to which pupils are prepared for their next steps in education, employment and/or training. Leaders should ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is more successful in allowing pupils to learn well over time.
- The use of alternative provision for some pupils is not effective. Leaders' monitoring of the pupils at alternative provision lacks rigour. These weaknesses in leaders' use and oversight of alternative provision mean pupils are not well

prepared for life after school. Leaders should review their use and oversight of alternative provision.

- Rates of attendance in school are low. This is the case for most groups of pupils, but particularly for pupils with SEND. As a result, pupils miss important lessons. They miss out on important messages about growing up in modern society. Leaders should work with parents and carers to improve the rates of attendance for all groups of pupils, particularly those with SEND.
- While falling, the rates of suspension for poor behaviour remain high. When not in school, pupils fall behind in learning and do not consistently catch up with their peers. Leaders must take action to further reduce the number of suspensions.
- Some pupils are not fully benefitting from the school's offer to support their wider personal development. This includes some pupils at alternative provision. Elsewhere, some older pupils want to know more about relationships and sex education. Leaders should ensure that the school's personal development offer meets the needs of all pupils.
- A notable proportion of parents and carers have a negative view of the school. Pupils have limited opportunities to share their views on life at school. Until recently, leaders have not been proactive in engaging with these important stakeholders. Leaders should enact the plans they have to better understand the frustrations of pupils, parents and carers. Reasonable steps should be taken to address matters that arise from this.

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

Unique reference number	146363
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10255557
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	889
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Blackburn
Principal	Ash Jacobs
Website	www.dixonsua.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Dixons Academies Trust in October 2018. When the predecessor school, Swallow Hill Community College, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2016, it was judged to require improvement.
- The principal joined the school in January 2023.
- The school uses seven alternative providers. Five of these are registered providers and subject to inspections by Ofsted. The other two are unregistered providers.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because

it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the principal and executive principal throughout the inspection. They also met many other members of the school's senior leadership team. A discussion was held with the vice-chair of the board of trustees and the chair of the local governing body. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the Dixons Academies Trust.
- To evaluate the quality of education, deep dives were carried out in English, mathematics, science, history and drama. These involved meeting subject leaders, reviewing curriculum plans, visiting lessons, speaking to teachers, talking to pupils about their learning and looking at samples of their work. Inspectors also considered other curriculum documents.
- The school's PSHE curriculum was also reviewed. Inspectors reviewed the provision for pupils with SEND, in addition to the school's strategy to support pupils to read.
- As part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding, the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and other records were reviewed. The checks made when appointing new staff were scrutinised.
- An inspector visited three alternative providers of education used by the school.
- The views of parents and carers, staff and pupils who responded to Ofsted's surveys were also fully considered.

Inspection team

James Duncan, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jamie Lawler	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Gordon Watts	Ofsted Inspector

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