

West Park Academy

Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington, County Durham, DL2 2GF

Inspection dates 25–26 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Early years provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The passion and enthusiasm of the headteacher, ably supported by a talented deputy headteacher and a committed staff have created a highly positive school atmosphere. As a result, pupils thrive and achieve well.
- Good and occasionally inspiring teaching enables most pupils to exceed what is expected of them. Disadvantaged, disabled and pupils who have special educational needs and those with English as an additional language achieve well.
- Increasingly, teachers make learning thought-provoking, interesting and challenging to help pupils think critically and for themselves.
- The high-quality spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils makes a telling contribution to their positive, friendly and helpful attitudes.
- Behaviour is good and at times exemplary. Pupils are keen to learn and are hard-working. Relationships between adults and pupils are rooted in mutual respect and trust. This plays a strong part in pupils' good achievement.
- Pupils' relationships with each other are typified by kindness, respect and tolerance. Consequently, pupils feel safe, enjoy school life and are happy.
- High quality care and nurturing are school strengths. New pupils are warmly welcomed when they arrive, often at other than the normal time.
- The rich and interesting curriculum helps to bring learning to life, stretch pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding.
- The committed governing body is highly supportive. Governors are ambitious for the school, well informed, challenging and display a firm grip on the strategic direction of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding enough to ensure a consistent pattern of rapid progress and high achievement.
- The good information available about pupils' progress is not always used to precisely pinpoint gaps in their learning.
- Occasionally, not enough is demanded of pupils: their work is not presented as accurately as it could be in mathematics, marking does not always provide helpful advice for improvement and essential corrections are not always completed.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons, including in five observations carried out with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Work scrutiny was also carried out with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and undertook learning walks around the academy in order to check the quality of what is provided for pupils.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils and had discussions with the headteacher, middle leaders, staff and governors.
- They also examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the academy’s view of how well it is doing, the monitoring of staff performance, the school’s improvement plan and records relating to pupils’ progress and behaviour.
- The inspection team took account of the 63 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 56 responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Deborah Wylie	Additional Inspector
Julie Goodfellow	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a much larger than average-sized primary academy.
- A very large majority of the pupils are of White British backgrounds with very few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is lower than the national average.
- Currently, there is a below average proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. This funding is to support those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- A few pupils are from service families and are supported through the services premium.
- A higher than average number of pupils join the academy at other than the normal time.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Children in early years attend part time for either morning or afternoon sessions. Typically, two-thirds of the children in the Nursery progress to Reception to be joined by children from other nurseries.
- The academy provides a breakfast club each day for pupils.
- West Park Day Nursery is a privately run day-care facility located on the site, but is not managed by the governing body. It is subject to a separate inspection. Reports for this setting may be viewed at <http://gov.uk/ofsted>.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is outstanding to enable pupils to make rapid progress and attain more highly by:
 - raising the expectations of what pupils, regardless of their starting points, can achieve, in relation to the accuracy of presentation of their work, particularly in mathematics
 - making certain that the good information the academy has in relation to pupils' progress is used effectively to pinpoint gaps in their learning to ensure all achieve equally well
 - making sure that teachers in their written feedback provide helpful advice for improvement to stretch pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding even further
 - ensuring that pupils quickly and consistently act upon teachers' demand for corrections in order to make certain any misconceptions are quickly eradicated.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers, including the governors, share the headteacher's passion and expectations that pupils from all backgrounds can achieve equally well in a warm, caring and harmonious atmosphere. As a result, the academy has successfully moved forward since it was established in 2011.
- A strong team of staff display a high level of commitment to ensure that pupils of all starting points achieve at least well. Pupils' performance and the quality of teaching are checked regularly. Consequently, senior leaders have an accurate view of academy and pupil performance and the main priorities for improvement. The positive actions taken to improve, such as developing the accuracy of pupils' spelling, are having the desired impact on improving skills.
- On the other hand, senior leaders do not always critically examine pupils' progress and attainment information enough. As a result, the identification of important gaps and misconceptions in pupils' learning which hinder the pace at which their knowledge and understanding is acquired, is not always precise enough.
- An enthusiastic group of middle leaders are increasingly confident and skilled in evaluating pupils' achievement. Any shortfalls in the quality of teaching and classroom support are tackled promptly and resolved. Teamwork is a strength as together leaders and managers work proficiently to ensure that improvements in progress and achievement made are sustained and constantly being added to.
- The rich range of activities taught within the interesting curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. There is a strong academy focus on developing literacy skills across all subjects and an ever increasing focus on developing numeracy skills. A stimulating range of visits and visitors provide pupils with a good understanding of the world in which they live. The highly positive promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development reinforces the British values of tolerance, respect and fair-play very well.
- The system to manage the performance of teachers is robust and ensures no automatic pay progression. Staff skills and talents, including those of middle leaders and those newly qualified, are developed well. This includes using bespoke training from an adjacent local authority. Well-thought-out training opportunities ensure that school improvement priorities and those of individual staff are well met.
- The close links and positive relationships that exist with parents ensure that attendance is above average and improved year-on-year.
- Additional funds to support the disadvantaged and pupils from service families are used successfully and the impact on their progress and attainment checked closely to ensure that any attainment gaps are systematically eliminated.
- Good use is made of the primary school sport funding to develop healthy lifestyles and skills. Consequently, participation rates are high, including in a range of after-school clubs. Teachers and support staff are better trained to enable a high level of skill development. The funding also provides wider sporting opportunities, such as archery, swimming and dance, for pupils to develop advanced skills.
- Safeguarding and child protection meet all statutory requirements. Procedures are firmly established and much effective practice is adopted in the day-to-day management, care and protection of pupils.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are understandably and rightly proud of the academy's highly positive atmosphere and enhanced reputation in the local community. They are committed to ensuring every pupil is given an equal opportunity to succeed. They are well informed and use their expertise effectively to both challenge and support senior leaders and staff. The governors have a detailed view of the quality of teaching as a result of their regular checks. They have an increasingly confident grasp of academy performance data, including the evidence of the impact of pupil premium funding. Governors also regularly check to ensure that performance management is robust.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In lessons and at social times pupils' attitudes to learning and their conduct are exemplary, greatly enhancing the positive academy climate. Pupils of all ages follow school and classroom routines extremely well, because they are clear about the boundaries that are set for their conduct.
- In the happy, friendly and busy school atmosphere, including at the start of the day in the breakfast club,

pupils are considerate and polite. They warmly welcome visitors and those pupils who join the school after the normal time. Their keenness to learn is evident in the quality of debate and free exchange of ideas they have with partners in lessons. During those infrequent times when pupils' concentration falters, the pace of learning does slow a little.

- Pupils report that behaviour is good throughout the day. They have a clear-cut understanding of the school's systems to manage their behaviour and greatly appreciate the meaningful rewards good behaviour can bring. They observe that there are very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour. When they do occur, staff act promptly, fairly and consistently to resolve any issues.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils affirm that they feel safe and enjoy academy life. This is reflected in their above average and rising attendance. The highly positive staff role models ensure that relationships are warm, supportive and respectful. There is much mutual respect and trust between pupils and staff.
- Pupils are well informed about bullying in all its different forms. They demonstrate a good awareness of how to avoid risk and keep themselves safe, such as from cyber-bullying. Pupils are firm in their view that racism and discrimination are not tolerated at any time by academy staff. They report that pupils of all backgrounds get on very well together.
- Highly effective procedures are in place to keep those pupils who are potentially vulnerable safe. Positive links with specialist agencies ensure that any concerns the staff may have about a pupil's well-being are quickly responded to and well-targeted support and nurturing provided.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching and learning is good and occasionally inspiring and thought-provoking. Senior leaders have worked conscientiously to continuously improve the quality of teaching. Classrooms are typically full of activity, interesting and well-managed areas for learning. As a result, learning is purposeful and engaging.
- Realistic expectations of what pupils can achieve are evident in most learning observed. Staff are well informed and demonstrate a good insight into the starting points of each pupil. Activities are thoughtfully matched to individual pupils' abilities and needs. In the most effective learning, there is an endless drive to constantly build upon each pupil's prior learning. However, on occasions the expectations of pupils of all abilities are not always high enough to foster rapid progress and high achievement.
- On the occasions when pupils' progress is fast and achievement high:
 - the demands made of pupils are high and tasks carefully tailored and assembled to stretch their thinking using the available good progress information
 - activities inspire and excite pupils' thinking and imagination
 - teachers closely follow pupils' thinking and use questions skilfully to check and test their knowledge and understanding
 - accurate assessment makes it clear to pupils how well they are progressing against the challenging targets that are set for them.
- When progress is a little variable and achievement requires a boost:
 - pupils' progress information is not used effectively enough to match tasks to ensure the right level of challenge for each pupil
 - activities lack that essential trigger to deepen pupils' understanding and 'fire-up' their imagination
 - written feedback in pupils' books does not always provide clear guidance to correct misunderstandings or misconceptions and pupils do not always respond consistently to suggestions for improvement.
- In learning activities when achievement is highest, pupils' thinking is challenged continuously in interesting ways. Teachers take much care to make certain that pupils of all backgrounds can join in and make a relevant contribution. For example, a group of younger pupils were observed totally engrossed challenging each other's thinking, speculating about how Jesus actually died on the cross and how exactly he rose from the dead.
- Pupils' work is marked frequently with pupils left in no doubt about what has been completed to a good standard. Marking is a strength in writing, because pupils receive detailed feedback and are given clear-cut improvement points.

- Teaching assistants work effectively together with teachers to give pupils timely prompts, help and advice, including for those disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

The achievement of pupils is good

- All groups of pupils, including those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, make good progress and achieve well from their individual starting points. Those pupils who join at other than the normal time settle quickly and confidently to make at least expected progress, because their needs are well understood and effectively met.
- Pupils are well prepared for Year 1 and continue to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics to reach at least average standards by the end of Year 2. In the most recent Year 1 phonics test a higher than average proportion than that found nationally reached the expected standard.
- By the end of Year 6 in 2014, national tests in pupils' attainment in reading was above average, average in mathematics and writing, but below average in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Since opening, the academy has worked hard to ensure that attainment at the end of Year 6 improves year-on-year.
- As a result of the variable picture last year, concerted action was taken by senior leaders to improve pupils' spelling, a particular weakness for many pupils. This is now paying dividends as current academy assessment information and work in books point to above average standards in grammar, punctuation and spelling and in writing to match those sustained above average standards in reading and mathematics. The proportions of pupils exceeding what is expected of them are set to be consistently above national levels in all subjects.
- The level of challenge presented to the most able pupils is being steadily raised. Tasks that encourage pupils to think critically, explain their thinking, make deductions and give reasons for their decisions capture and hold interest well. Consequently, the uneven pattern in the standards achieved by most able pupils in tests last year is being quickly eradicated. The most able pupils in the current year 6 are on track to exceed the national average for higher level attainment in all subjects.
- The needs of those pupils who have special educational needs are quickly and accurately identified. Intervention and support are well targeted to meet all of their needs. As a result, most pupils make good progress, with reducing inconsistencies in the rates of progress across the special educational needs cohort.
- In the 2014 tests at the end of Year 6, although their progress was similar to their classmates, disadvantaged pupils were between one and four terms behind other pupils nationally in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. Compared with others in the academy, the gaps were between three and four terms behind in all subjects. Current gaps look set to be almost eliminated in mathematics, reading and writing compared to national averages and at least halved with others in the academy. This improvement is endorsed by the academy's progress information, observations of learning and the scrutiny of pupils' work in books.
- Excellent progress is being made fostering a love and enjoyment of reading. In lessons, pupils are frequently encouraged and expected to read. Younger pupils' reading is confident, fluent and increasingly accurate. Older pupils enthusiastically discuss aspects of their choice of books, authors and themes.

The early years provision is good

- Most children enter the Nursery with skills that are broadly typical for their age. Children settle quickly in the warm, friendly atmosphere. They speedily learn to follow classroom routines, such as self-registering at the start of each session.
- The high quality of relationships with staff is a real strength and this contributes much to the good progress the children make in their play, learning and development. Staff quickly assess starting points and identify their individual talents and interests. This ensures learning and play can be tailored to suit individual needs, such as capturing the interest of boys in early reading by using their keen interest in dinosaurs.
- All children are kept safe and are well-cared for in the well-organised classrooms both indoors and outdoors. They speedily develop good self-control and learn to share toys and equipment and help and support each other when playing and learning.
- Teaching is good and at times stimulating. Activities engage children of all backgrounds well. This includes

those who arrive at other than the normal time or who join the academy from a different nursery. Good opportunities are provided for children to successfully build upon their speaking, listening and number skills. Confidence is enhanced particularly well as children are encouraged to be responsible and develop perseverance and independence.

- Staff regularly check, record and document children's progress and development. This helps to inform day-to-day activity planning well. Good opportunities are provided for children to pursue their curiosity exploring and investigating. The positive engagement of parents provides staff with valuable information about their children's development.
- Competent leadership ensures that routines and the organisation of children's learning, personal development and welfare are effective. The increasing emphasis on fostering the early skills of blending sounds and letters together (phonics) to make sense of words is proving successful. As a result children acquire an early grasp of reading and accurate spelling in their writing. A similar emphasis upon early number and counting skills is enabling children to make good progress. Good opportunities are provided for children with gaps in their early learning to catch up.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137042
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	449704

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	464
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barrie Armstrong
Headteacher	Catherine Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01325 380792
Fax number	-
Email address	admin@westparkacademy.org.uk

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