

Inspection of a good school: West Park Academy

Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington, County Durham DL2 2GF

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 March 2024

The principal of this school is Sam Hirst. The school is a single academy trust, Shared Vision Learning Trust. The trust is run and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Maurice Jones.

Outcome

West Park Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at this vibrant school. They enthusiastically engage in a curriculum designed to help them understand who they are, where they come from and who they aspire to be.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. Pupils achieve well across the curriculum, particularly in reading and phonics. They behave well in lessons and during social times. Pupils say that bullying rarely happens, and, if it does, they are confident that leaders will deal with it swiftly and effectively.

Adults know the pupils extremely well. If pupils have any worries, they let teachers know at a daily 'emotional check in'. Staff respond quickly to these worries and put support in place for pupils if needed. Pupils feel safe at school.

Pupils take part in a range of visits, for example to an Anglo-Saxon farm and village. They talk with excitement about how this helped their learning in history. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive in their view of the school. Many praised the support given to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that is ambitious and relevant to pupils, including those with SEND. Across the curriculum, there are links to the local area. For example, pupils study the history and geography of the river Tees. These links often include a visit, and together they help pupils to understand where they come from. In foundation

subjects, pupils research an enquiry question. This allows them to apply the knowledge they have learned in an evaluative way.

Subject leaders are experts in their subject. They have carefully selected the knowledge that pupils will learn and have designed a curriculum that builds from Reception through to Year 6. In core subjects, teachers regularly check pupils' knowledge and help pupils to catch up with daily interventions if needed. In some foundation subjects, pupils' learning is not checked as frequently as it could be. As a result, leaders do not know how well pupils are achieving in these subjects and teachers do not consistently identify gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Reading is a priority across the school. Children learn to read as soon as they start in Reception. Staff who deliver phonics have a thorough understanding of the programme and are highly effective in its delivery. Published outcomes show that pupils achieve well in phonics and reading across the school. Pupils who need extra help with phonics or reading are quickly identified and receive targeted support to fill gaps in their knowledge. Across the school, pupils read daily. They talk with enthusiasm about their favourite books. Pupils enjoy reading at West Park Academy.

The school's work in supporting pupils with SEND is particularly strong. As a result of this, pupils with SEND achieve well, based on their individual starting points. Staff work closely with parents and outside agencies to ensure that teachers have a thorough understanding of the needs of each individual pupil. Teachers use this information to adapt their lessons effectively. A small number of pupils access an alternative curriculum in the 'hub' provision. This curriculum is carefully designed to meet the needs of the pupils. The staff delivering the curriculum are experts in SEND. The pupils in the hub are thriving.

Leaders have established effective systems to track attendance and identify and provide support for pupils who are absent more than their peers. As a result, attendance is high. A clear system is in place across school to encourage positive behaviour. Pupils understand the system. Staff implement it consistently across school. As a result, the school is calm and orderly, and pupils demonstrate positive behaviours for learning.

Leaders have created an effective personal development curriculum. This includes weekly 'circle time' and 'picture news'. These sessions provide a chance for pupils to debate topical issues from within school, the local area, and the national and international news. This helps pupils to understand more about the world in which they live. The school is developing a careers offer. Previous pupils visit the school to share their experiences of further education and careers. This helps pupils to decide who they aspire to be.

Staff are proud to work at West Park Academy. They feel supported by the school's leaders, who are mindful of their workload and well-being. Leaders have adapted the marking policy to reduce staff workload. Those responsible for governance have a strong oversight of the school and are ambitious for its future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Assessment is not yet well embedded across some foundation subjects. As a result, staff do not consistently identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school should ensure that all foundation subjects have a systematic approach to assessment.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2015.

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	137042
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10320376
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Maurice Jones
Principal	Sam Hirst
Website	www.westparkacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- West Park Academy is a larger-than-average primary school.
- The school is a single academy trust, Shared Vision Learning Trust.
- The school has a breakfast club and after-school provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- The lead inspector discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in this evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector also spoke with the chair and other members of the trust board.
- The lead inspector carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in corridors, and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils about behaviour and bullying. The inspector spoke with leaders, teachers and pupils about the school's programme of personal development.
- 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 lead inspector considered the views of pupils, parents and staff through discussions and looking at information collected from Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Chris Sergeant, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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