

The Rydal Academy

Rydal Road, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4BH

Inspection dates	4–5 May 2016
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
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The determination and focus of the headteacher have driven improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour. Staff are well motivated and work hard to achieve good outcomes for pupils.
- Teaching is good. Staff plan work which is well matched to pupils' needs and interests. Pupils are motivated to learn and make good progress.
- The quality of leadership, teaching and learning, and provision in the early years is good. As a result, children make good progress from their starting points.
- Senior leaders ensure that the quality of teaching and learning and the pastoral support for children is good. Their well-targeted approaches have improved pupils' personal development, welfare and progress.
- Subject leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. They have put in place effective actions to bring improvements in their areas.
- Leaders make good use of performance management and training to promote good teaching and raise pupils' achievement.
- Governors know the school well. They provide a good balance of support and challenge to the headteacher and senior leaders.
- The trust directors provide effective strategic leadership. Their support has enabled leaders to be clearly focused on improving pupils' outcomes.
- Behaviour in lessons and social times is good. There is a calm, orderly and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching over time across the school. As a result, pupils' attainment and progress is not outstanding.
- Not enough pupils achieve the higher standards in writing by the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- Subject leaders' skills to check the impact of actions to bring school improvements are not fully developed.
- Low attendance by some pupils reduces their time in school and opportunities to learn.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school to achieve outstanding outcomes by:
 - sharing the very strong practice which exists in the school to further develop the quality of teaching over time
 - further raising expectations for the most-able pupils.
- Further develop leadership capacity by:
 - developing the roles of middle leaders, particularly in relation to checking the impact of their actions and by strengthening their links with governors.
- Further improve attendance levels and eliminate persistent absence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher's ambition and determination are bringing discernible improvements across the school. He has clearly identified the route for the school's development. This is well understood by other leaders and staff and they are highly motivated to bring about these improvements. As a result, the quality of teaching, standards of behaviour and pupils' progress have all improved rapidly.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of the priorities in their areas of responsibility. They take effective action to improve the quality of teaching and improve pupils' personal development and welfare. Regular checking makes sure that their actions have a positive impact on pupils' well-being and their learning.
- The leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability and pupils in vulnerable groups is good. Well-planned provision in classrooms and additional interventions enable these pupils to make good progress. Effective links are made with specialist agencies to ensure that these pupils' needs are accurately identified and the appropriate support is provided.
- Subject leaders work through a team approach to improve pupils' outcomes across a range of subjects. Their actions have resulted in improving pupils' progress and enthusiasm to learn independently. For example, the introduction of online mathematics learning is motivating pupils and reinforcing key skills. Middle leaders' checks on the impact of their actions are still developing, as are their links with governors.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet the interests and needs of pupils. The school's focused approach to improving pupils' understanding in reading, writing and mathematics is paying dividends. Introduction to the learning for the week through 'Magic Mondays' inspires and encourages pupils to learn. Pupils' physical development and personal and social skills are well developed through a range of opportunities. The school's extensive extra-curricular opportunities enrich the curriculum. For example, breakfast club and youth club provide extended learning and social development opportunities for pupils.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Their wide range of roles and responsibilities around school, visits to a variety of places of faith, anti-bullying squad and Eco-Warriors are some examples of how the school develops pupils' citizenship.
- The school's systems for recording pupils' progress and attainment are well linked to the curriculum. The accuracy of assessment judgements are rigorously checked both by school leaders and by external validation.
- Well-targeted support and coaching, including the use of video technology, are effectively used to improve the quality of teaching. Staff new to the school are thoroughly supported. This brings a consistency of approach to the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers value highly the training provided to improve their practice.
- Systems to manage staff performance are thorough. Careful checks on staff performance are completed by the headteacher and senior leaders. This information is used to provide governors with a clear overview of the effectiveness of staff in raising standards.
- The pupil premium funding is spent to good effect. The headteacher and governors carefully check the progress of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding. As a result, these pupils show improving progress in English and mathematics.
- The additional funding for sport and physical education is used effectively to increase the opportunities pupils have to enjoy physical activities and participate in competitive sport. This is providing pupils with access to a wider range of sports, increasing participation and helping to raise their self-confidence.
- The headteacher has made effective use of school networks and local authority guidance. Improvements to the quality of teaching have been successfully supported by specialist leaders in education (SLEs) from Carmel College. Effective objective views of the school's improvement have been provided by Darlington local authority and commissioned from Durham Education Development Service.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The local governing board has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Very effective support and challenge to the headteacher and senior leaders ensure that leaders are held highly accountable for improvements in pupils' outcomes and welfare.
 - Effective systems are in place for the performance management of the headteacher and staff. Pay progression is appropriately linked to teachers' performance.
 - The trust board has a good strategic overview of the school. It has provided effective support with leadership development and business and facilities organisation. This has released the headteacher

and senior leaders to successfully focus on developing the quality of teaching and improving pupils' outcomes.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Strong, robust systems and practice are in place. The school's pastoral team knows the needs of vulnerable pupils well and is active in seeking support for pupils and families. Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training. For example, training on how to deal with extremism and radicalisation has improved staff skills and the school takes appropriate steps in reporting such incidents where necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching is good with some examples of very strong practice. This is why pupils are making good progress.
- Very positive relationships between staff and pupils create a constructive learning atmosphere in lessons. Teachers use a wide range of approaches, including 'Magic Mondays', to engage pupils' interest. Pupils are encouraged to make choices in their learning and to challenge themselves to improve.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge is evident in the quality of their explanations and the way they model learning for pupils. This helps pupils to quickly grasp key learning and provides effective frameworks to structure their responses in lessons.
- Teachers make good use of regular assessments to plan lessons that are largely well matched to the needs of pupils. However, on some occasions the most-able pupils are not as fully challenged as they could be.
- Teaching assistants support pupils' learning well both through support in lessons and targeted interventions. They have a good understanding of what is to be taught and of pupils' individual needs.
- Staff use effective questioning to deepen learning and to identify any areas where pupils do not fully understand in lessons. They use this information to promptly address any learning gaps.
- Teachers consistently follow the school's marking policy. Pupils are keen to respond to marking with their 'purple pens' and this is helping them to improve the quality of their work.
- A well-structured approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is adopted across the school. This is ensuring good continuity in the development of reading skills from early years and through key stage 1.
- Pupils read well and enjoy reading both in and out of school. Regular structured reading lessons develop pupils' comprehension and vocabulary skills effectively.
- Teachers set appropriate homework to support learning. Regular learning of spelling, reading and mathematics skills supports pupils' progress in English and mathematics. Pupils are motivated by the opportunity to choose from a range of learning activities on 'the homework grid'. This encourages pupils to become independent learners.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are self-confident and prepared to put forward their views in a thoughtful and respectful way. They carefully listen to the ideas of other pupils.
- Pupils develop a good understanding of how to be a successful learner. This is because teachers provide them with clear targets for improvement and with opportunities to select learning activities which will move their learning forward.
- Assemblies both celebrate pupils' achievements and encourage pupils to reflect on qualities such as perseverance and resilience. This helps pupils feel safe and valued as members of the school community and encourages self-belief and aspiration.
- Pupils' physical and emotional needs are well met by the school's curriculum. Very effective support is provided by the school's pastoral team for pupils and parents whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- The number of pupils starting and leaving school during term times is much higher than that found nationally. The school has effective systems to promptly identify and meet the learning and social needs of these pupils.

- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They understand the different forms of bullying and confirm that they are confident that bullying incidents will be dealt with appropriately by staff. Falling numbers of bullying incidents reflect the positive approach staff take to following up such incidents.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In lessons pupils work hard, cooperate well in groups and are keen to share their learning with others. Pupils move around school in a calm and orderly manner. They are courteous, for example often holding doors for adults and other pupils.
- Learning breaks, or playtimes, are taken at flexible times across the day. This enables teachers to choose when a break will best meet pupils' learning and social needs. At these times pupils are well behaved and engage in lively games or in quieter sociable activities.
- Pupils behave well during lunchtimes. Staggered timings bring together different year groups to the hall where staff join with pupils to eat, chat and play games. Pupils respond positively to these adult role models, which further improve their behaviour.
- The school has a well-structured behaviour policy. Regular rewards and praise for demonstrating expected behaviours encourage pupils to behave well. Incidents of poor behaviour have fallen substantially since the school's previous inspection.
- Levels of attendance remain stubbornly below national averages despite the unstinting work of school leaders to improve it. The school has used a wide range of approaches to address this issue and levels of attendance are improving over time. Leaders and governors remain highly focused on addressing this area as they appreciate that if all pupils were to attend regularly they would make even better progress.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Outcomes for pupils are good because pupils' progress from their starting points is good across the school. Where pupils are currently working below the standards expected for their age they are catching up quickly. Leaders analyse pupils' progress regularly and put in place plans to promptly close gaps in learning.
- In 2015, pupils' progress across key stage 2 improved significantly in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's information and work in pupils' books demonstrate that there are currently good levels of progress across the school in these subjects.
- Children's outcomes in the early years have shown substantial improvements over the last three years. In 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development was close to that found nationally. Current information on children's progress shows that this improvement is continuing.
- From their starting points pupils make good progress in developing their phonics skills. Over the last two years the proportion achieving the expected standards in phonics has improved and is close to the national average. The proportion of pupils currently on track to achieve the expected standard demonstrates further improvements in Year 1 pupils' phonics outcomes.
- In 2015, disadvantaged pupils' progress improved in reading, writing and particularly mathematics. As a result, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils who attained the expected levels in English and mathematics improved. The school's information shows that the vast majority of these pupils are currently making at least expected progress and some are making better progress.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability make good progress from their starting points. This is because the school carefully reviews the support required for these pupils. Effective progression plans identify their specific learning needs and appropriate interventions are in place to ensure that these pupils achieve well.
- In 2015, the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the higher standards in writing was significantly below that found nationally. The school has focused on improving writing across all year groups. Currently the most-able pupils generally make at least expected progress in all subjects and some are making more than expected progress.
- Increasing proportions of Year 6 pupils are well prepared for starting secondary school as their improved progress is helping them to achieve better in English and mathematics.
- In 2015 the school's Year 6 results did not meet the national floor standards. However, pupils' progress from starting points have improved substantially since the previous inspection and demonstrate a clear trajectory of improvement. Assessment information for current pupils shows that outcomes across the school are good.

Early years provision

is good

- Children start in the early years with skills and abilities that are generally below those typical for their age. From their starting points, children make good progress. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has improved considerably over the last three years and in 2015 was close to that found nationally. Assessments of children currently in the Reception classes demonstrate that they are making at least good progress and some are making rapid progress. As a result, an increasing proportion of children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Children learn successfully in vibrant indoor and outdoor provision. This inspires their curiosity and stimulates their learning. Staff carefully plan the activities to meet children's interests and learning needs. For example, during a play-dough pizza-making activity, children developed their understanding of simple fractions and improved their independent writing skills by listing the pizza ingredients.
- The quality of teaching is good. The strong teaching across both the Nursery and Reception classes provides an effective balance of teacher-led activities and opportunities for children to explore and learn by themselves. Staff use questioning effectively to reinforce and develop children's learning.
- Children's phonics skills are well taught through structured adult-led sessions. This is helping children to make good progress in reading from Nursery.
- Early years leadership is strong. The deputy headteacher has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the early years. Well-planned developments to provision and support to improve the quality of teaching are rapidly improving children's outcomes.
- Staff have high expectations for children's behaviour and give clear guidance to support children. As a result, children behave well and their social skills develop effectively.
- Outcomes for children supported by early years pupil premium improved considerably in 2015. The early years pupil premium has been appropriately targeted to enhance levels of teaching assistant support and opportunities for learning experiences outside of school.
- Early years staff work well with parents. Well-established systems promote communication between the school and parents. Training for parents helps to provide support and guidance on how they can help their child make good progress in school. Parents are involved with assessments of their children's progress and are very positive about the support provided by early years staff. A recently introduced online system is further improving parents' opportunities to be involved with children's learning in school and home.
- There are good partnerships with other professionals including the local children's centre. This helps the school to promptly address children's developmental or special educational needs.
- Children feel safe and secure. Their safety is paramount to staff, and children are well supervised in safe, secure classrooms and outside learning areas. Safeguarding is effective and all welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	138989
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10012083

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	577
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hazel Bullock
Headteacher	John Armitage
Telephone number	01325 380784
Website	www.therydalacademy.co.uk
Email address	admin@therydalacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	29–30 April 2014

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from the Gypsy Roma Traveller minority ethnic group is higher than the national average and has increased since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well above that found nationally. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium is well above average. Pupil premium is the funding the school receives for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The levels of mobility of pupils joining and leaving the school are higher than those found nationally.
- The school has benefited from support from specialist leaders in education (SLE) from Carmel College Teaching School.
- Rydal Academy opened in December 2012. It is a sponsored academy and is part of the Longfield multi-academy trust.
- In 2015 the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed parts of 25 lessons. The headteacher and senior leaders joined the inspectors for seven of the observations in lessons during the inspection.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around school and reviewed the school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The inspectors observed pupils in the playground and during lunchtime.
- The inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in their books and in the learning journals of children in the early years.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, three subject leaders for English and mathematics, as well as the special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing board and held a meeting with the executive headteacher representing the Longfield Trust.
- A group of pupils discussed their opinions about the school, their attitudes and their learning with an inspector. Inspectors listened to a total of six key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils read.
- Inspectors took account of the nine written responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View. Inspectors held discussions with parents at the end of the school day.
- The lead inspector considered the 42 staff questionnaire responses received and the 40 responses to the pupils' questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including minutes from meetings of the local governing board, pupils' achievement information and the school's evaluation of its own performance and development plan. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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