

Grace Academy Darlaston

Herberts Park Road, Darlaston, Wednesbury, West Midlands WS10 8QJ

Inspection dates

26–27 April 2017

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the last inspection, leaders have set high expectations for staff, and for pupils' behaviour and progress. As a result, academic standards are rising strongly.
- Leaders know their school well, and address effectively areas of comparative weakness.
- Teachers use detailed assessments to set work which is accurately based on what pupils can already do. They demonstrate a thorough knowledge of their subjects.
- Staff consistently promote literacy by encouraging pupils to read and ensuring that they learn key vocabulary.
- Teaching across the school in mathematics is strong because pupils learn to think mathematically and apply their knowledge to practical situations.
- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils left key stage 4 having made progress that was below that of other pupils nationally. Although their progress is now rising, many disadvantaged pupils have some catching up to do to fulfil their potential.
- Some inconsistency remains in the quality of teaching and assessment when classes are taught by temporary or inexperienced teachers.
- Governors and trustees have a detailed understanding of the school, and clear strategies for its long-term development.
- Strong routines and a good understanding of the importance of behaviour ensure that pupils' conduct in lessons and during social times is good. Pupils take a pride in their work.
- Pupils learn well how to guard against a wide range of risks. They rightly feel safe in school. Safeguarding procedures are effective.
- Students on 16 to 19 study programmes are generally making strong progress because they are following courses well matched to their abilities and interests, and teaching is good.
- In recent years, the progress of students on post-16 academic courses has not matched that of students on applied courses.
- Leaders' plans do not state clearly how leaders will judge the impact of their actions. Some staff are uncertain about the school's priorities and the actions taken to address them.
- Teachers' questioning sometimes fails to probe pupils' thinking sufficiently to deepen their understanding of the work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by making sure that:
 - the best teaching in the school is shared fully so that there is consistently strong practice
 - teachers' questioning gives pupils more frequent opportunities to think deeply about their work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders support inexperienced and temporary teachers in maintaining the school's expectations for the quality of pupils' work and the provision of feedback to pupils
 - making sure that all members of the school community are clear about the school's priorities, and how leaders evaluate progress towards the school's key objectives.
- Ensure that disadvantaged pupils make at least as much progress as other pupils nationally, especially in geography and history, by continuing to provide academic and social support which accurately meets their needs.
- Raise standards on academic courses in the sixth form so that progress at least matches that on applied courses by checking on students' progress regularly and supporting effectively those at risk of falling behind.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, leaders have raised their expectations for pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and set ambitious individual targets for their academic progress. They have taken decisive action to address the issues raised at the previous inspection including those relating to the sixth form. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are rising strongly across the school.
- Leaders set demanding objectives linked to pupils' progress against which to measure teachers' performance. Staff, including teachers at an early stage of their careers, say that leaders are supportive and that the training they receive is very helpful in developing their skills.
- Key to the school's improvement has been the implementation of a routine system of assessment, which continually measures and records pupils' acquisition of knowledge and skills. This has helped to ensure that teachers set work which builds accurately on what pupils can already do. It has also improved pupils' motivation, as they can see the progress they are making and what they need to do next.
- The principal has a perceptive and balanced view of the school's performance which allows leaders to focus effectively on the right priorities for further improvement. Leaders have accurately identified the social factors which inhibit disadvantaged pupils' learning, and this has enabled the school to spend the pupil premium effectively. They have rightly emphasised the central importance of literacy, and ensured that the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium is well spent. Leaders' views of the teaching jointly observed during the inspection were perceptive.
- Leaders provide a balanced curriculum, and take good account of pupils' skills and interests. At key stage 4, which begins in Year 9, pupils are able to choose some of their courses from a reasonable range of options but, as leaders acknowledge, some pupils would value the opportunity to choose from a few additional subjects. Some courses are taught after school. Pupils make good use of a wide range of extra-curricular provision, largely in sport and music.
- Tutor time, assemblies and whole days devoted to particular topics develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively. For example, pupils described to inspectors the strong impact of a dramatic presentation on healthy relationships. Visitors to the school have challenged any stereotypical views of particular social groups, promoting tolerance and equipping pupils with the understanding to become responsible citizens. Pupils receive effective impartial careers guidance, especially in the sixth form.
- Leaders check regularly on pupils' progress, and use the results to identify the additional steps required to support those pupils at risk of falling behind. Teachers check their judgements on pupils' attainment with those of their colleagues, and increasingly with those made by teachers in other schools. Leaders spend additional money provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively. They ensure that teachers know how best to meet these pupils' needs, and involve other professionals to support pupils appropriately.

- Senior leaders provide good support and training for subject leaders, several of whom are relatively new in post. Subject leaders are playing an effective and increasing role in checking on standards in the school, although inspection evidence indicated that some inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and feedback to pupils, typically when classes are taught by temporary or inexperienced teachers.
- School improvement plans identify appropriate time-limited actions to address the school's priorities, but do not record how leaders and governors will judge their impact. In discussion with inspectors, staff were hazy about specific priorities and how they were being addressed, while being strongly supportive of leaders' overall aims for the school.
- The trust supports the school well. The sponsor makes resources available for staff to develop pupils' engagement in learning and enhance the skills they require for the next stages in their education. The school benefits from increasingly close collaboration with the trust's other academies, for example in holding joint training for staff.
- Leaders make effective checks on the very few pupils who receive alternative provision.

Governance of the school

- Governance is highly effective.
- Governors know the school intimately, and how its performance compares with that of other schools nationally. They use their professional expertise in education and in other fields effectively to evaluate the school's progress and to plan its development. They have a strong strategic vision, for example concerning the role of post-16 provision in the future of the school.
- Link governors meet frequently with school leaders to discuss particular aspects of the school's work, and help to ensure that the local governing body and the academy trust keep up to date with progress in these areas. They hold leaders to account. Governors make sure that additional money such as that provided for disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is spent effectively.
- Governors ensure that they play a full part in keeping pupils safe. They are well trained in managing the various risks to young people, and have conducted an independent safeguarding audit to check that the right policies and procedures are in place. They understand the local community, and the particular issues it presents.
- The trust manages the performance of the principal effectively, and makes the final decisions on the pay and performance of other staff in the light of the principal's recommendations.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's arrangements meet all statutory requirements, and all policies and procedures are up to date. Leaders regularly evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, and provide staff with frequent updates on any changes to legislation or pupils' circumstances.

- Inspectors found that leaders keep good records, which are easily accessible to the appropriate staff. Staff are alert to any potential risks, and leaders react promptly to any concerns they raise. They work well with parents, and make effective contact with the other agencies which protect young people, persisting until they know that the pupil's needs are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved strongly across the school, and continues to do so. This is primarily because teachers regularly assess pupils' progress against a checklist of specific skills. This detailed record then gives teachers the basis on which to plan work that represents the appropriate next steps for each learner in the class, including the most able and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils are keen to learn, and benefit both from teachers' encouragement and from the clarity with which the checklists enable them to visualise their own progress. They are committed to improving their work, and generally make good use of feedback. Teachers know their subjects well, and at key stage 4 explain effectively to pupils how they can obtain the best marks in examination questions.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are consistently good. Teachers have established strong classroom routines, and use time wisely, so that learning proceeds at a good pace. Pupils work together constructively when teachers ask them to do so. Teachers typically manage any inattentive behaviour effectively.
- Homework makes a good contribution to pupils' learning. The school makes helpful arrangements for those pupils whose homes do not provide an environment which supports their studies.
- Teachers promote literacy very well. They encourage pupils to read aloud in lessons, and make sure that they understand any new key terms. Teachers across the curriculum check pupils' spelling and punctuation. Pupils read fiction regularly in school, and say that the adoption of a commercial reading scheme has significantly increased their enjoyment of reading. Pupils of all ages make good use of a well-stocked library.
- Pupils learn well in mathematics because teachers encourage them to think mathematically and pay due attention to how mathematics can be applied in real-life situations. Teachers set work which presents a particularly stiff degree of challenge, and insist on a very high standard of presentation.
- Recent appointments have led to a marked improvement in the quality of teaching in history and geography, especially at key stage 4.
- The quality of teachers' questioning during the inspection is a little inconsistent. In some lessons during the inspection, including a number in science, teachers' questions were effective in probing pupils' understanding and encouraging them to think more deeply about the subject. On other occasions, questioning was superficial, and did not use the time productively.
- Inspection evidence confirmed leaders' records that showed an increasingly consistent pattern of teaching across the curriculum and throughout the school. A large and rising proportion of teachers have become effective in setting high expectations for the

quality of pupils' work and their academic progress. However, some variation remains, and standards in a few classes, typically taught by temporary or inexperienced teachers, have sometimes dipped.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils understand the importance of their education, and how their attitudes contribute to effective learning. They explained to inspectors how stricter rules on behaviour, such as a ban on mobile phones, have improved their experience of school. Equally, they value the rewards they can earn through good work, attendance and behaviour.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare, and that there is no discriminatory behaviour. They have every confidence that adults can resolve any conflict quickly and effectively. Pupils therefore feel entirely safe in school, and the very large majority of parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire agree.
- The school teaches pupils how to stay safe in many respects, and involves visiting speakers, theatre companies and other agencies to reinforce key messages, such as the importance of consent and forming healthy relationships. Pupils are well informed about online safety, the importance of mental health and how to act responsibly in the community.
- Leaders have identified that, historically, a lack of aspiration has been a significant brake on the achievement of many pupils. They have therefore implemented a successful programme to alert pupils to the options available to them and the value of aiming high. Pupils generally value the more specific guidance provided by independent careers advisers. Almost all pupils find appropriate education or training when they leave school, either at the end of key stage 4 or when they leave the sixth form.
- Older pupils have good opportunities to take on additional responsibilities, and to act as representatives for pupils' opinions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Their behaviour in the corridors and at social times is orderly and responsible. Pupils treat staff and each other with courtesy. They wear their uniforms with pride, and respect the school's well-maintained facilities.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are consistently positive. They bring the right equipment to their lessons, settle to work quickly, and present their books to a very high standard. They are interested in their own academic progress, and want to succeed. Pupils report that learning is disrupted only rarely, typically in classes where there has been a high turnover of teachers.
- Staff and pupils are unanimous that standards of behaviour have improved markedly since the last inspection, and that this has been key to improving pupils' achievement. The school balances rewards with clear sanctions, and provides effective support for individual pupils with social and emotional difficulties. However, when the principal

introduced the current policy, some pupils failed to respond to routine sanctions, and in 2015/16, the rates of both fixed-term and permanent exclusion were high. This academic year, the proportions of pupils excluded have dropped sharply, and are now approaching the national average.

- Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average, and has improved a little this academic year. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which had been low, has improved considerably.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In the last two years, an improving quality of teaching, a more ambitious culture and aspirational targets for pupils and teachers have led to better academic progress across the school. Outcomes for pupils leaving Year 11 in 2016 were, in general terms, considerably stronger than they had been for the equivalent cohort in 2015. Inspection evidence showed that achievement continues to rise.
- Inspectors' observations and scrutinies of pupils' work confirmed information supplied by leaders showing that in almost all subjects across the school, pupils are making strong and increasing progress. Progress in geography and history is accelerating, although in some humanities classes attainment is still low and pupils have a great deal to do to catch up with the standards expected of pupils of their age.
- In 2016, pupils left Year 11 having made progress overall in English and in mathematics which was in line with that made by pupils nationally. The progress of groups of pupils from different starting points was broadly similar.
- In recent years, the school's published results have shown that disadvantaged pupils have made progress below that of other pupils nationally, especially in English and the humanities subjects. Amongst those currently in the older year groups, there remains a legacy of underachievement. However, in general disadvantaged pupils are now making progress in line with that of other pupils in the school, and so beginning to diminish the difference between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally. This improvement results from teachers' close attention to disadvantaged pupils' academic needs, and the longer-term success of the school's strategies to engage them fully in their learning. The quality of disadvantaged pupils' work sampled by inspectors was similar to that of their peers.
- The most able pupils in the school make strong progress across the curriculum because the school sets them demanding targets, and because teachers use the ongoing record of their progress to set particular tasks which represent a suitable challenge. Some of the most able disadvantaged pupils have responded particularly well to links with local businesses which have raised their aspirations for the future.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities normally make strong progress from their different starting points. This is because leaders make detailed plans explaining how pupils' individual needs can best be met, and teachers implement them effectively. Leaders liaise well with colleagues in primary schools and those who give specialist advice.
- Leaders' focus on literacy, consistently supported by the staff, has had a major impact upon many pupils' attitudes to reading, including the reading of fiction. Inspectors

witnessed the culmination of one particular project in which 14 lower-attaining boys in key stage 3 had read a number of books from the 'Horrible histories' series. When some of these pupils read to inspectors, they explained how their confidence and level of interest had increased. Information showed their reading ages had advanced on average by more than a year over the course of a few months.

- Pupils' constructive attitudes, their increasing competence in English and mathematics and good advice on their future options mean that pupils are generally well prepared for the next stage in their careers.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leaders have taken strong and effective action to improve the quality of provision for post-16 students so that it is now good. They have discontinued a number of academic courses, set clear entry requirements for those that remain, and adopted procedures from the main school to track students' progress and attendance. As a result, almost all students are now on programmes well matched to their abilities and ambitions. Retention at the end of Year 12 dipped in 2016, but has recovered this academic year.
- In 2016, students who completed both academic and applied courses had made progress which was broadly average, although progress on applied courses was stronger. The progress of disadvantaged students on academic courses was below average. Leaders recognised that these results reflected the fact that some students had struggled on courses better suited to those with higher prior attainment. A high proportion of students without GCSE grades A* to C in English or mathematics made progress towards a C grade.
- Information supplied by the school and in general terms confirmed by inspection evidence showed that students' progress, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils, is increasing in most subjects. Current students in Year 13 are on track to achieve higher grades on average than those in the previous cohort.
- Teaching on the 16 to 19 study programmes is good. Teachers have adopted the assessment procedures used in the main school. They maintain an ongoing record of the knowledge and skills which each student has acquired, and use this to plan their next steps. Teachers have expert subject knowledge, and provide detailed feedback on students' work.
- Information and guidance both for Year 11 pupils considering the sixth form and for those on 16 to 19 study programmes is now good, and as a result, all students progress onto higher education, apprenticeships or training. Crucially, staff make arrangements for students to enrol at other schools if the Grace Academy does not offer the post-16 courses best suited to the individual's prior attainment and interests.
- Relationships between students and staff in the sixth form are strong. Students told inspectors that, 'We feel like a face, not just a number,' and that teachers made every effort to help them with their work. Students dress smartly, arrive punctually and their attendance is in line with that of the main school.
- Students benefit from a wide range of non-qualification activities, including opportunities for voluntary work, enterprise activities and a comprehensive programme of personal and social education focused on the importance of healthy relationships.

They know how to keep themselves safe from a wide range of risks. All students complete work experience, with the expectation that it relates to students' aspirations. The requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are met.

School details

Unique reference number	135956
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10032612

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	725
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Baker
Principal	Carl Salt
Telephone number	0121 568 3300
Website	www.graceacademy.org.uk/darlaston
Email address	darlaston@graceacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 May 2015

Information about this school

- Grace Academy Darlaston is a smaller than average-sized secondary school where the number of pupils on roll is growing. It is one of three academies in the West Midlands sponsored by the Grace Foundation.
- The majority of pupils are White British. Other pupils are drawn from several different ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils recorded as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.

- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is high.
- At key stage 4, a very few pupils with acute medical needs currently receive full-time alternative provision at the Shepwell School in Willenhall. Further details are withheld in the interests of confidentiality.
- Although some subject leaders are new to their roles, staff turnover has reduced since the last inspection. The assistant principal with responsibility for 16 to 19 provision has been in post since April 2016.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 11.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 27 lessons. Two lesson observations were conducted jointly with a senior leader. Inspectors also observed tutor time, an assembly and pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- The inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, other leaders and class teachers. The lead inspector met with governors, a trustee and the chief executive of the academy trust.
- Four groups of pupils, three chosen at random, met with inspectors. Inspectors spoke with a large number of pupils informally. One inspector listened to pupils from Year 7 and Year 8 read.
- The inspectors looked at many workbooks in their visits to classrooms, and scrutinised in depth much of the work produced by some pupils of average ability in Year 7 and Year 10. They considered a wide range of information about pupils' current and recent performance.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, both electronically and on paper. These included development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; reports to parents; policies; the minutes of governors' meetings; and anonymised information showing how the principal manages the performance of teachers. Inspectors scrutinised in detail records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils.
- The inspection took account of the 27 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, comments made using the free-text service and the school's own parental surveys. They also considered 22 responses to the pupil questionnaire, and 31 responses to the questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Natasha Lloyd	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Martin	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017