

Inspection of a good school: The Rydal Academy

Rydal Road, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4BH

Inspection dates:

4–5 December 2019

Outcome

The Rydal Academy continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff want the very best for their pupils. They have built a school where pupils feel welcome and included. Staff are very attentive to pupils' personal needs.

Leaders provide pupils with focused days on particular subjects. These days include visits to museums and places of historical and natural interest. Pupils value these experiences. However, pupils do not consistently learn about subjects such as geography, history and science in enough depth. As a result of effective planning and teaching, pupils acquire secure knowledge and skills in mathematics. Actions to develop pupils' reading comprehension skills are less developed.

Adults build positive relationships with pupils. They talk to pupils about their learning and their interests. The curriculum supports pupils' social and emotional development well. Staff offer 50 additional clubs and activities every week. These include sport, music, art and cooking. Over 600 pupils have taken part in these clubs this term.

The vast majority of pupils feel safe in school. Leaders encourage positive behaviour. There is a purposeful atmosphere in classes. Leaders take any incidents of bullying seriously. They work with pupils to resolve any concerns.

Parents and carers value the support their children receive. They appreciate the activities on offer and the commitment of the teachers.

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

Leaders have a strong sense of moral purpose. They know the needs of their pupils and their community. They offer high-quality support for pupils and families. Leaders also provide opportunities for pupils to learn, play and keep fit before and after the school day. Staff show a substantial commitment to meeting the pupils' wider needs.

Leaders have designed a curriculum that addresses gaps in pupils' experiences. They offer a programme of focused days or 'Magic Mondays' on particular subjects. This learning is then complemented by activities over the course of the week. Pupils value these experiences. However, the work required of pupils does not allow them to explore subjects or apply their learning in sufficient depth. This makes it difficult for teachers to know what pupils have learned. Pupils do not securely build their knowledge in subjects such as geography, history and science over time.

Pupils have a thorough understanding of mathematics. Learning in mathematics is planned carefully to build on what pupils already know. Teachers do not move learning on until they are confident that pupils have a secure understanding.

Pupils receive a prompt start to learning phonics in the Nursery and Reception class. Leaders provide effective support to help children and pupils to catch up. Teachers match reading books to the sounds and letters pupils know. They are using a range of strategies, including online resources, to motivate pupils to read more. These approaches are also encouraging parents to read with their children. Initiatives to develop pupils' comprehension skills are less developed. This has led to mixed progress in developing pupils' reading skills over time. Leaders have recently introduced new approaches to sharpen pupils' reading skills and expose them to more challenging texts.

Leaders have expertise that supports pupils' personal, social and emotional development. Their support for the most vulnerable pupils is very strong. Staff provide specialist teaching to support pupils' speech and language development. Leaders have modified their support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some pupils receive support in focused groups. Others receive extra support and catch-up sessions. This allows pupils with SEND to access the full curriculum. Leaders also make sure that pupils with SEND attend after-school clubs.

Pupils' attendance has improved significantly over the past year. Incidents of exclusion of pupils from school because of poor behaviour are rare. Leaders have developed an orderly and purposeful place for pupils to learn and achieve.

The headteacher provides clear direction. He has established a school where all pupils are valued. Leaders have built close links with the local community. Many pupils transfer to the school from other schools and providers. Parents of pupils new to the school value the welcome their children receive. Leaders care about their staff and have taken steps to manage their workload. Parents who made their views known are very happy with the care and the education that their children receive.

In the early years, adults know and care for the children well. They build children's speech and language skills effectively. They provide specialist help for children which supports their development. Children take part in regular planned trips and visits. These develop children's understanding of the world around them. Adults also pay close attention to children's early reading and mathematics. Leaders are building closer links with parents. These links are supporting children's wider learning at home.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have built a strong safeguarding team. They know their pupils and the risks they may face. Leaders train staff on safeguarding. They make sure that staff focus on pupils' safety. Leaders' actions support the safety and welfare of pupils and families. They follow up and record any concerns over pupils' safety. The safeguarding team works with other professionals to support pupils' welfare. Leaders teach pupils about safety through the assemblies and workshops they provide. Leaders carry out thorough checks on the suitability of adults working at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have developed a curriculum that provides pupils with memorable experiences. Pupils' knowledge in some subjects, such as geography, history and science, is less developed. The work required of pupils does not enable them to explore the curriculum in sufficient depth. Leaders need to improve their curriculum planning to ensure that pupils know and remember more in the wider curriculum. For example, pupils need more opportunities to apply their knowledge in subjects such as geography, history and science.
- Leaders and teachers are developing pupils' phonics skills. Pupils' wider comprehension skills are less developed. Their progress in reading has been mixed. Leaders need to intensify actions to sharpen pupils' reading skills to improve their understanding.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 4 and 5 May 2016.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	138989
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10110838
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	624
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Derek Bell
Chair of local governing body	Mark Gray
Headteacher	John Armitage
Website	www.therydalacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 May 2016

Information about this school

- In March 2018, the school joined the Swift Academies Trust.
- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school and has increased in size since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND, including those with an education, health and care plan, has increased since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has also increased.

Information about this inspection

- We held discussions with the headteacher and a range of senior leaders. I also talked to members of the local governing body and a member of the trust.
- We talked to pupils in meetings and at break and lunchtimes to find out their views on behaviour and safety.
- We looked in detail into the curriculum in reading, mathematics and computing. We

talked to leaders and teachers about their curriculum plans. We also talked to pupils about their learning and what they knew and remembered in these subjects. We looked at pupils' work. I looked in additional detail into history and other subjects taught through the school's 'Magic Monday' programme.

- We listened to teachers reading with pupils.
- We checked safeguarding arrangements. We looked at the school's work to make staff and pupils aware of safeguarding issues. We also looked at safeguarding records to see how concerns over pupils' safety are recorded and followed up. We explored how leaders check the suitability of adults working on site.

Inspection team

Malcolm Kirtley, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joan Hewitt

Ofsted Inspector

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