

# Inspection of Skerne Park Academy

Coleridge Gardens, Darlington, County Durham DL1 5AJ

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Inspection dates: 15 and 16 February 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Early years provision

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Skerne Park Academy is a caring school. Pupils get lots of opportunities to learn how to stay safe and healthy. Pupils like and trust the staff. 'They never give up on us,' is a typical comment.

The youngest children make a good start in early years. They get into good routines and thrive in the well-organised provision. However, older pupils often struggle to remember key learning from the curriculum. This is because teachers introduce new content before pupils have fully understood previous learning.

Pupils feel safe in school. They say that staff are good at sorting out problems such as bullying. Some pupils struggle to manage their behaviour. These pupils get a lot of support, but sometimes there is disruption in lessons. This is usually dealt with quickly and learning is not affected. Poor behaviour is more common at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Some pupils do not show respect to staff or to each other. The atmosphere during breaktimes and lunchtimes is not calm or orderly.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive the help they need in lessons. Those who need a bit more support attend the school's 'Pathways' provision. Here, pupils with SEND get extra help from well-trained staff. They enjoy being with Amadeus, the school therapy dog. Most pupils do well in the provision and make a successful return to their classes.

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

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have trained teachers as subject leaders. Together, they have reviewed the school curriculum. They have identified what pupils should learn in each subject and in each year group.

In reading, learning is carefully sequenced. Teachers revisit what pupils have learned. They make careful checks on what pupils know. As a result, pupils learn phonics and become fluent readers.

In other subjects, such as mathematics, history and science, this sequencing is less effective. Teachers introduce new content before checking that previous ideas have been understood. This leads to gaps in pupils' understanding. Leaders do not check pupils' knowledge well enough. For example, they do not check that the work recorded in books is fully understood.

Leaders are working hard to support children and families. They recognise the increasing challenges brought on by COVID-19. Many pupils are experiencing difficulties with their mental health and their behaviour. Increasing numbers of pupils are persistently absent. Staff absence related to COVID-19 has led to additional interruptions to learning. Leaders and governors are determined to help pupils settle at school. They have developed a 'team around the school'. They work closely with a

wide range of different agencies. Together they are addressing community issues that affect some pupils, such as antisocial behaviour.

Pupils have lots of opportunities to reflect on their mental health and learn how to manage their behaviour. However, incidents of poor behaviour have increased in the wake of COVID-19. Most staff manage low-level incidents of poor behaviour effectively. Despite this, senior leaders often need to intervene to resolve more serious behaviour incidents. This takes up leaders' time and affects the well-being of staff. Leaders know that the behaviour of pupils needs to improve. They have plans in place to review the school behaviour policy and procedures.

The school's approach to teaching early reading is well established and effective. Children learn phonics from the start of Reception Year. All teachers are trained to deliver the phonics programme. They use the same approach across Year 1 and Year 2. Pupils practise their knowledge of phonics by reading books which match the sounds they know. All teachers read stories to their class, so most pupils can talk about stories or authors they enjoy. Pupils who fall behind are identified early. These pupils receive extra phonics lessons throughout the week. This helps them to catch up.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum in early years meets the needs of children. There is a good relationship between the school and other local nursery providers. This allows early years staff to provide support for children with SEND right from the start. Adults seize any opportunity to help children to learn. For example, children made a barrier of sticky tape to keep the Big Bad Wolf away. Adults helped them, reinforcing words like 'over', 'under' and 'through'.

Leaders and governors provide an education for pupils that extends beyond the academic. In personal, social and health education, pupils learn how to stay safe and how to maintain healthy relationships. Pupils enjoy and remember these lessons. They say that the topics are relevant to their experience. Pupils show a good understanding of equalities. They learn about British values such as democracy through elections for school council. Pupils gain an understanding of diversity through learning about celebrations such as Diwali and Eid. Many pupils attend clubs, where they learn new skills and make friends.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors are vigilant and care deeply about pupils' safety. Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well. They do all they can to help families that are more vulnerable. All staff are alert to signs that pupils might be at risk. Reporting and recording procedures are robust. Leaders take swift action to protect any child who might be at risk of harm. All senior leaders are trained safeguarding leads and support each other well.

The curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe. For example, pupils hear from police and fire crews about the risks of local features such as the river, the railway line and the local busy road. Pupils show a good understanding of online safety.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The behaviour of some pupils in lessons, and particularly at breaktimes, is not good. Dealing with this poor behaviour is putting a strain on the capacity of the leadership team and affecting the well-being of staff. Leaders should implement their plans to review the school behaviour policy, so that there are clear and effective systems in place to improve behaviour.
- In some lessons, teachers' use of assessment is not effective. Pupils' misconceptions are not identified or addressed. Consequently, pupils are introduced to new concepts without the necessary prior knowledge. This prevents pupils remembering what they are taught. Leaders should ensure that teachers check pupils' learning in lessons more effectively, so that pupils' misconceptions are addressed promptly.
- Leaders do not check the quality of education effectively. For example, they assume that pupils understand content because of work recorded in books. This is not the case. As a result, leaders are not aware of some of the weaknesses in teaching that affect how well pupils learn curriculum content. Leaders should ensure that they check the implementation of the curriculum more thoroughly. This will give them a more secure picture of what pupils have learned over time.

## **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.

If you are the school and 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139195
<b>Local authority</b>	Darlington
<b>Inspection number</b>	10200709
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	325
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair</b>	Sarah Rose
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sarah Hardy
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.skernepark.org.uk/">www.skernepark.org.uk/</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	1 and 2 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The interim headteacher has been in post since September 2021.
- The school is part of the Hummersknott Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust comprising Hummersknott Academy and Skerne Park Academy.
- The school offers nursery provision to 18 children.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils. It also operates after-school provision on Friday afternoons.
- The school uses alternative provision on occasion for a very small number of pupils. This is through Darlington local authority's pupil referral unit, Rise Carr College.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During this inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. The lead inspector met with the executive principal and with governors, including the chair of the local governing body. The lead inspector also held conversations with representatives of the local authority, including those responsible for alternative provision.
- Inspectors spoke with several teaching and support staff, including early career teachers, and considered responses to Ofsted’s staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors met with pupils throughout the inspection, both formally and informally, during breaktimes, lessons and at breakfast club. There were no responses to Ofsted’s pupil survey.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, history and science. Inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, listened to pupils read to a familiar adult, talked with pupils and looked at pupils’ work. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning in other subjects.
- To evaluate the school’s management of safeguarding, inspectors considered relevant school policies and documentation, examined the single central record and the school’s procedures for the safer recruitment of staff. Inspectors talked with leaders, staff, governors and pupils to check their views on safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the five responses to Ofsted Parent View and spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day. Inspectors also considered previous parent surveys sent out by the school.
- Inspectors considered pupils’ behaviour in and outside lessons. Inspectors also examined school behaviour records and spoke with pupils about behaviour.

## **Inspection team**

Ian Dawson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Foster	Ofsted Inspector
Angela Whistler	Ofsted Inspector

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