

Inspection of The Rydal Academy

Rydal Road, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4BH

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 December 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

All staff aim to make Rydal Academy a haven for all who attend. There are high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Leaders do everything they can to protect, guide and support the pupils in their care. This extends beyond the school day and beyond the school gates.

A rich extra-curricular offer is available to all school-age pupils. At least three free clubs are available each evening. 'Pasties and pullovers' is a new club open to parents, offering cost-of-living support for the wider family.

A greater proportion of pupils enter and leave the school at times other than those expected. Such is the strength of care received that those pupils new to the school settle quickly and make friends.

Pupils understand systems to manage behaviour. At times, a small minority of pupils need an extra layer of support. Regulation zones provide this. Here, pupils use mindfulness techniques to regulate their emotions. A seamless re-introduction back to class follows. This allows the learning of others to continue uninterrupted.

Pupils know that bullying can happen anywhere. They know about the different types of bullying and what to do if it happens. Pupils also know that to see it and say nothing is unacceptable.

Pupils say that they love school and their teachers and that they 'learn lots'.

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

Following the last inspection, leaders overhauled the school's curriculum. Teachers now teach discrete subject-specific lessons. Subject leaders are supportive and show great enthusiasm in their role. They are knowledgeable in their subject and have mapped out the essential knowledge that pupils will learn step by step. The rigour given to this process has led to schemes of work that are of a good quality. When teachers show good adherence to the curriculum schemes of work, pupils can talk about their learning with confidence and excitement. Occasionally, there is some variability in teachers' implementation of the schemes of work. When this happens, pupils' knowledge is less certain. Leaders know there is more to do to make sure that schemes of work are embedded fully. They have systems in place to help them do so.

Assessment approaches across all curriculum subjects are effective. Gaps in pupils' learning are soon identified and extra interventions are organised. For example, pupils struggling to learn new phonic knowledge receive additional same day support to help them to keep up.

Pupils know the importance of reading. Phonics teaching follows a validated scheme. Although the scheme has only recently been introduced, pupils are acquiring phonics knowledge with precision. Staff are getting to grips with the new approach. Pupils practise their reading with books that are well matched to their knowledge. They read with confidence and increasing fluency. Pupils enjoy the recently purchased reading books. They study a wide range of genres from different authors. These texts also act as a stimulus for pupils' writing.

Leaders know how important it is for pupils to be in the right emotional place to learn. The curriculum for pupils' personal development supports this. The school's work to support pupils' mental health and well-being is impressive. For example, 75 pupils are mental health champions ready to support their peers. However, some aspects of the curriculum to promote pupils' personal development are not as well established. These include aspects of relationships education and cultural diversity. Some content for these aspects of the curriculum is not carefully sequenced to ensure that pupils can develop their knowledge and understanding well.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) ensures that all staff set high expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has a thorough and holistic knowledge of all pupils in need of more support. Strategies identified in pupils' personal plans are helping them in the classroom. Pupils who benefit from the school's internal 'enhanced learning and mentoring support provision' receive more specific help. Here, pupils can work with higher levels of adult support.

Curriculum choices for children in the early years focus on accelerating children's key language and communication skills. Leaders have considered the knowledge children need to know to be ready for Year 1 and beyond. Provision for two-year-olds is recently established. Children are already making huge developmental gains through learning alongside older children.

Leaders provide calm and purposeful leadership. They are ambitious for all pupils. Leaders have created a warm and caring school where pupils are valued as unique individuals.

Staff feel well supported in this nurturing school. They know there is always someone to support and advise. Leaders do all that they can to manage staff workload. Staff morale is high.

Governors understand their role. They have an acute understanding of the challenges faced by the community they serve. This does not lessen their drive for excellence. Improvements to their monitoring programme are strengthening their strategic oversight of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The dedicated safeguarding officer is diligent in his work. Although recently appointed, he has quickly got to grips with the wealth of information that sits behind every child in need of support. An equally committed and knowledgeable team supports him in his role.

Recording and reporting of safeguarding incidents is factual and succinct. A detailed chronology shows that the actions taken by staff to support pupils are timely.

Staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training. They know the procedures they must follow if they think pupils maybe at risk. Leaders use support from external agencies well to reiterate important messages to pupils and their families.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some aspects of the curriculum for personal development are not well sequenced to ensure sufficient coverage of important knowledge. This means pupils have a limited understanding of some aspects of the curriculum linked to relationships education and cultural diversity. Leaders should review the sequencing of the curriculum for relationships education and cultural diversity to ensure there is sufficient coverage of important knowledge to support pupils' understanding further.
- There is some variability in the effectiveness with which some teachers adhere to curriculum schemes of work. This impacts on some pupils' confidence to talk about their learning and to remember essential knowledge. Leaders need to embed further their schemes of work to iron out any remaining variability in implementation, so that all pupils can make the gains in the subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding intended.

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](#)' 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	10241011
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	615
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Derek Bell
Headteacher	John Armitage
Website	www.therydalacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 and 5 December 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has recently extended its age range to accommodate provision for a maximum of 12 two-year-old children.
- The school runs a free breakfast club and after-school youth club.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this graded 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and the SENCo.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding officer and the deputy designated safeguarding officer, and scrutinised relevant policies and procedures.

- Inspectors met with the chair and vice chair of the local governing board and two other governors. Inspectors also met with the chief executive officer, the chair and vice chair of the trustees and the director of finance for the trust.
- A telephone discussion was held with the education development partner for the school.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in early reading, mathematics, history, science and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, talked to pupils about their learning, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised a sample of pupils' writing and met with the subject leaders for personal, social and health education and religious education.
- Inspectors reviewed the free-text responses of parents and considered the responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to the staff survey and met with staff.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school was observed and behaviour logs and incidents were reviewed.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the pupil survey and met with pupil groups to discuss their understanding of behaviour and how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection team

Diane Buckle, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Warner	Ofsted Inspector
David Hodgkiss	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Cook	His Majesty's Inspector

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